
United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) Background Guide

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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) Background Guide

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The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), known in Spanish as the *Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe* (CEPAL), was established in February 1948 to strengthen the economic development of Latin America, though its scope and name were broadened to include the countries of the Caribbean by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)’s resolution 1984/27 in July 1984¹. The Commission is headquartered in Santiago, Chile, with two subregional offices for Central America and the Caribbean in Mexico City, Mexico and Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, respectively. Following the United States’ withdrawal from the Commission in January 2026, there are 45 Member States in the Commission from across Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, North America, and Europe, and 14 non-independent Caribbean territories who are Associate Members².

UNECLAC is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations. In the decades since its establishment, the Commission has proven itself to remain adaptive and dedicated; in October 2022, UNECLAC debuted 10 priority policy areas for transforming the development model in the region: promoting productivity, productive development, employment and inclusive growth; reducing inequality; universalizing social protection and improving the welfare state; improving education and vocational training; promoting gender equality and the care society; promoting sustainability and climate change adaptation and mitigation; digital transformation; suitable migration management; promoting regional and global economic integration; and macroeconomics for development³. The mission of the Economic Commission for Latin America

¹ Salazar-Xirinachs, José Manuel. 2026. “About ECLAC.” Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2026. <https://www.cepal.org/en/about>.

² Ibid.

³ Caribbean, Economic Commission for Latin America and the. 2017. “History of ECLAC.” WwW.Cepal.Org. October 18, 2017. <https://www.cepal.org/en/about/history-eclac>.

and the Caribbean is to secure the productive and sustainable economic development of the region by strengthening economic relationships with the broader global community and supporting endeavors that contribute to stronger economies across Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite the smaller size of many of the nations in Latin America and the Caribbean compared to those in other parts of the world, collective efforts and embracing innovation in development models have proven to be advantageous to the UNECLAC's mission.

At the center of this mission is the Commission's commitment to social justice and securing an equitable and safe quality of life for its people. In June 2011, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Declaration of San Salvador on Citizen Security in the Americas, which included recognition of transnational organized crime as an ongoing threat to public safety, peace, and security across the global south⁴. This Declaration was co-signed by then-Executive Secretary of UNECLAC, Alicia Bárcena, on behalf of the Commission, who called for a regional plan of action built on long-term policies that strengthened national and regional institutions' focus on equal rights and development, which would in turn help protect vulnerable communities from the influence and threat of transnational criminal organizations⁵. In November 2000 the UN adopted Resolution 55/25, the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which was an international agreement to combat transnational organized crime groups. Among other measures, the UNTOC laid out guidance for criminalization of members and participants of organized crime groups, money laundering, and corruption of justice for UN Member States⁶. UNECLAC Member States, therefore, committed to engaging in coordinated international action by adopting the UNTOC's frameworks for extraditions, transnational cooperation of law enforcement, and mutual legal assistance. Transnational organized crime interferes with economic development by establishing illicit economies. UNECLAC published its report on the economic impact of transnational organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2022, which reported on studies indicating that illegal economies fueled by transnational organized crime could contribute to 3.4% to 13% of regional GDP⁷. Money laundering, tax evasion, extortion illegal mining, smuggling and arms

⁴ "AG/DEC. 66 (XLI-O/11) Declaration of San Salvador on Citizen Security in the Americas" 2017

⁵ "United Nations Welcomes Regional Action Plan to Tackle Crime and Insecurity in Latin America" 2026

⁶ (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.)

⁷ (Carrión et al., n.d.)

trafficking, and production and sales of illicit narcotics and pharmaceuticals are factored into this number as activities supporting such illegal economies by the World Bank, UNODC, the International Money Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank.⁸ The nature of transnational crime makes it a complicated security issue that is difficult for states to respond to through traditional justice systems. The crimes transcend borders, and actors integrate their crimes within legitimate economic sectors within multiple states' economies and social systems through money laundering and taking advantage of gaps in how states define legal and illegal markets.

Equally so, UNECLAC has begun focusing on the environmental and sociopolitical cost of climate change and natural disasters. As the second-most disaster-prone region in the world, Latin America and the Caribbean are facing the brunt of the consequences of global climate change. Hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides, extreme heat, droughts, volcanic eruptions are among the natural disasters experienced across the region, though their impact is worsened by the effects of climate change, such as increasing the intensity of storms and prolonging droughts through rising temperatures. Sociopolitical instability can exacerbate these crises, especially in vulnerable communities that are already facing poverty, food insecurity, poor infrastructure maintenance, and high instances of violence and crime. Sociopolitical disasters can be defined as crises emerging from factors such as ineffective or unstable governments, socioeconomic inequality, global economic instability, resource constraints caused by foreign actors through restrictive trade embargoes or high tariffs, or instances of conflict and war⁹. Both forms of disaster are disruptive and devastating to communities and national infrastructure. They are also interrelated; often the effects of sociopolitical instability impact a country's capacity to effectively prepare for or respond to natural disasters, which in turn can prolong recovery efforts and fallout from such crises and lead to distrust in government leadership and national unrest.

Delegates in this committee should examine how transnational crime and the aftermath of natural and sociopolitical disasters can hinder or even harm economic development and identify strategies to maintain stability despite their impact.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ (Canavan and Ide 2024)



I: Transnational Crime

Statement of the Issue:

From slavery to drugs to corruption, these are crimes that truly know no borders. Transnational crime is defined as a “multi-billion-dollar industry that operates across borders, exploiting vulnerable people and undermining global security”¹⁰. These criminals partake in anything from organ trafficking, illegal firearm trades, to wildlife destruction. The scale of these crimes is monumental, from severely depleting countries’ GDP, to destroying people's livelihoods. Several forms of transnational crime have increased in recent years. The World Drug report showed that the number of people suffering from a drug-use disorder increased 45% from 2011-2021. The International Labour Organization estimated that a total of \$236 billion dollars in illegal revenue was generated from human trafficking victims alone. Illicit arms dealing, gang activity, money laundering, and environmental crimes all saw similar, staggering increasing trends. Many of these statistics can only be estimated, due to the wide scope of the crimes and the many nations involved with their activity.

The importance of this subtopic for this committee is that Latin America and the Caribbean is a monumental epicenter for these crimes. Gaps in governance and laws combined with the strategic geographical trade between North America, Asia, and Europe, have made Latin America/The Caribbean into a hub. As the UNECLAC committee, the various member states will have unique challenges in tackling this issue. The success of transnational crime is largely based on the various jurisdictions involved in the crime, entangling several sets of laws and various government agencies while trying to bring justice. Sovereignty and respecting each member state’s jurisdiction will be paramount in this committee but will provide unique challenges. Inequities in funding and military and police power in certain member states

¹⁰ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2026. “United Nations Welcomes Regional Action Plan to Tackle Crime and Insecurity in Latin America.” <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/united-nations-welcomes-regional-action-plan-tackle-crime-and-insecurity-latin-america>.



compared to others will also need to be addressed, as it can delay investigation and judicial processes.

History:

When most people think about transnational crime, drug-trafficking is one that comes to mind. The warm, humid climate of Latin America makes it perfect to grow the coca and poppy plant, and the Caribbean acts as a giant shipping hub for the cultivated plants. Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia serve as the coca producers, while Mexico is known for the production of marijuana, heroin, and other synthetic drugs. Through trade routes via Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, many of these drugs are shipped to the United States, while trade routes through the Caribbean lead to shipments in Europe. Cocaine trade, especially, is not a newly organized concept. In the 1970's, Miami, Florida became the major hub for the cocaine trade, with nearly 70% of the country's supply entering through there. In addition to cocaine, nearly 70% of the marijuana supply, and other synthetic drugs made their way over through the Miami trade. Miami became a playground for the Colombian cartels, leading to the infamous Miami drug war in the 1970's and 1980's ¹¹.

At the heart of the Miami trade was Pablo Escobar, and the Medellin Cartel. Escobar started off as a small-time gang member, before escalating into the marijuana trade in the 1960's, and escalating to cocaine in the 1970's. At the time, cocaine was thought to be non-addictive, and the market boomed in America because of this misconception. With the demand for cocaine so high, and a well-organized and dangerous cartel behind him, Escobar became worth about \$25 billion dollars. Escobar's influence fell everywhere, even earning him an alternate congress seat in Columbia in 1982. While the Medellin cartel eventually fell with Escobar's death in 1993, his corporate methods for the drug trade would set the stage for the modern drug trade.

Other notable crime drug lords are El Chapo and Nankissoon Boodram. El Chapo (Joaquin Guzman Loera) was once known as the world's most powerful drug trafficker, thought to be responsible for an estimated 34,000 deaths. Operating in rural parts of Sinaloa and

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¹¹ Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations. 2025. "Latin America and the Caribbean." United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/piracy/latin-america-and-the-caribbean.html>.

Durango, El Chapo was able to dominate his rival cartels and gain control of the US trading routes to monopolize the entire market. On top of the drug trade and violence, the cartel used a complicated money-laundering system to legitimize their massive drug portion, funneling an estimated \$36 billion dollars throughout American banks and businesses. While El Chapo's cartel operated out of Mexico, Boodram operated in Trinidad and Tobago. While Boodram was never formally charged for his drug-related activities, he was known to be one of the biggest Kingpins in the area, with an estate of 115 acres. The vast number of ports and open coastal areas in Trinidad and Tobago made it a hub for shipping drugs into other continents. From Escobar to Boodram, all of these cartels took advantage of the Latin America and Caribbean geography, and using violence, money, and corruption, were able to make these regions their playground ¹².

None of these crimes would be nearly as lucrative without the ability to successfully launder money. Pablo Escobar and his cartel were instrumental in revolutionizing this process in the 80's in the United States, making vast amounts of USD that even they could not imagine. In fact, the laundering was so successful that counting and keeping track of the money was more tedious and difficult than just laundering it. At first, the money would be hidden in Colombia, buried under rivers and converted into pesos. Burying the money was risky however, so traffickers soon relied on loopholes in American banks to deposit the money safely there. Before efforts were made to strengthen airport/coastal security, money would also be sent to places like the Bahamas, and Cayman Islands for safe keeping. Despite there being a set of anti-money laundering laws in place in the 1970's, many of the banks seemingly ignored these laws, allowing the cartels to act freely. A strong black-market was established in Colombia, as the USD needed to be converted into pesos to be valuable in the country. When the government and the banks finally did crack-down and enforce the laws, the Colombian cartel turned the pesos black market into their own personal bank. The drug side of the business was kept separate from the money side, and they relied on the black market to exchange the USD into pesos. The system works quite well, feeding USD into local businesses and pesos into the cartel's hand. An estimated \$5 billion USD is laundered from the drug business alone, not including profits made from alternative forms of business ¹³.

¹² InSight Crime. 2019. "Joaquín Guzmán Loera, Alias 'El Chapo.'" InSight Crime, InSightCrime, March 29.

¹³ PBS Frontline. n.d. "Special Reports - the Black Peso Money Laundering System | Drug Wars | FRONTLINE | PBS." www.pbs.org.

Drug trade and money laundering are just two of the many lucrative forms of transnational crimes that these gangs engage in. The activities go hand-in-hand with the illicit firearms trade, human trafficking, exploitative labor, environmental crimes, and corruption. The scope of these crimes is extremely vast, and as such, delegates are advised to tackle these two topics for efficiency purposes.

Analysis:

Certain efforts from many of the member states in this committee have seen positive outcomes when it comes to fighting transnational crime. Military intervention in Mexico by President Calderon in 2006 for example, led to a drug bust of 5.5 tons of cocaine. Militarizing the war on drugs is a tactic that has seen positive results in seizures in countries like the US and Mexico, but the delicate balance between respecting citizens' homes and effective military action must be maintained to do so. Brazil's 2026 Operation Disarmament was another such action, done in collaboration with the United States for real time cargo monitoring. The operation led to the seizure of over 1000 illegal firearms and helped to dismantle parts of the trade. When it comes to specific actions by member-states, what truly makes them successful is sharing intelligence with other agencies and governments. While the operations begin at a regional or local level, what distinguishes their success is cross-collaboration, and identifying the root of the crime rather than simply pursuing the criminals.

As the UNECLAC committee, delegates can pursue several avenues to further combat transnational crime. When it comes to drug trafficking, supporting agencies responsible for hunting down drug cartels is a paramount strategy. Aiding and funding these agencies will allow for early seizure of the drugs before they leave their country of origins. Funding and further training should also be given to law enforcement officers, particularly those placed at airports and shipping ports, to identify illicit shipments. Careful consideration should be given to monitoring ports, highways, and other methods of transportation to track the routes that drug cartels often take. The committee should also look into education campaigns in order to spread awareness about drug-uses dangers and encourage nations to create drug-prevention programs. Additionally, money-laundering works hand-in-hand with every transnational crime known.

Criminals are dependent on these methods, as it allows them to conceal the illegal money in circulation from their crimes. The flow of these funds across the globe must be disrupted in order to prevent the criminals from profiting off the crimes. Any agencies focused on financial intelligence should be well-funded and provided with the support of all member-states in the committee. Further training and up-to-date technology will allow illegal assets to be frozen and seized, and any third parties mediating the money can be identified with haste. Transparency from all the nations present in committee, and banks in the respective countries will allow for a smoother investigation process¹⁴.

While the criminals are the ones aiding transnational crime, the corrupt government officials are the ones abetting it. Corruption is what allows drug trafficking, money-laundering, and other crimes to remain undetected and indeed, unpunished. Harsher punitive measures and government accountability for corruption may become a pertinent debate topic amongst the committee. Creating agencies to fight and detect corruption, and protecting any whistleblowers who cooperate will aid in the reduction of transnational crime. Identifying corruption not only leads us to individuals who are abusing their power, but can lead us to the actual criminals themselves, and give the committee insight into their logistical operations.

Conclusion:

The issue of transnational crime is extremely complex and nuanced, containing not only various types of crimes but several stakeholders in the entire process. As several types of illicit activity has sky-rocketed globally, especially with the rise of technology and social media, the issue of transnational crime must be addressed with much urgency. Latin America and the Caribbean are one of the hearts of this global syndicate, forming vast networks of trade and contacts. The crimes destroy the lives of average people, exploit institutional weaknesses, and take advantage of gaps in the judicial system. It is the responsibility of the committee to address past failures and successes in halting transnational crimes. Member states will need to address solutions and create new systems to disrupt the vast trading networks. A comprehensive review of technology and its role in the increased transnational crime should also be considered. Above all, the committee will need to ensure that every nation's sovereignty and jurisdiction is

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¹⁴ Ibid.

respected, while bringing forth the perpetrators and getting justice for the many victims of the trade.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can UNECLAC promote greater regional cooperation against transnational organized crime while respecting the sovereignty and differing institutional capacities of member states?
2. How can UNECLAC support the governments of its member states to pursue and indict members of transnational crime groups and corruption in bodies of authority to maintain accountability and prevent the spread of transnational crime?
 1. Consider the possible benefits and downsides of keeping convicted members of transnational crime groups in their home country or extraditing them to serve their sentence elsewhere.
3. What aspects of transnational organized crime are most pressing for the committee to address and provide resources for? How can the committee be most effective when different aspects of this issue are most prevalent in different countries (i.e. violence in Mexico, drug trafficking in Colombia, etc.)?

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II: Natural Disaster and Sociopolitical Crises Relief and Recovery

Statement of the Issue:

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region of immense resilience and potential. Its journey towards sustainable development and self-reliance is, however, complicated by the region's colonial history and ongoing sociopolitical challenges. The region's future, therefore, is human-driven; UNECLAC is one of the leading intra-governmental platforms equipped to create systems and programs that can help recover from the crises that leave Latin America and the Caribbean vulnerable in times of disaster.

Natural disasters are an inevitability of the world; hurricanes, tropical storms, floods, blizzards, earthquakes, forest fires and extreme heat are devastating examples which have been worsened by climate change. For the purpose of this background guide, climate change should be understood as the long-term shifts in Earth's weather patterns and temperatures caused by human activity and natural processes¹⁵. The United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change refers to the adverse effects of climate change as "changes in the physical environment or biota resulting from climate change which have significant deleterious effects on the composition, resilience or productivity of natural and managed ecosystems or on the operation of socio-economic systems or on human health and welfare". The UN defines natural disasters as "the consequences of events triggered by natural hazards that overwhelm local response capacity and seriously affect the social and economic development of a region"¹⁶. While interrelated, these terms should be approached as distinct issues that are not interchangeable.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the second-most disaster-prone region in the world; between 2002 to 2022, over 190 million people were impacted by 1,534 instances of natural disasters¹⁷. Its geography, with many coastal and densely populated urban areas, leaves many nations exposed to hazards from extreme weather and, consequently, much more vulnerable to

¹⁵ NASA. 2024. "What Is Climate Change?" Science.Nasa.Gov, NASA, October 21. <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/what-is-climate-change/>.

¹⁶ Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, United Nations. 2025. "Unterm." Un.Org. <https://unterm.un.org/unterm2/en/view/UNHQ/70B287180C5658B885257ABF005660DC>.

¹⁷ Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations. 2023. "Overview of Disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2022 | UNDRR." Wwww.Undrr.Org, September 8. <https://www.undrr.org/publication/overview-disasters-latin-america-and-caribbean-2000-2022>.

devastation caused by losses in industries and social systems such as infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, and food access.

The relationship between political stability and a country's capacity for disaster relief and sustainable recovery, therefore, cannot be ignored. Sociopolitical crises, in which pursuit of certain demands and actions taken by different actors leads to mobilization at the social, political and military levels, sometimes escalating to the point of violence and armed conflict, such as coups, repression, bombings, attacks, and protests, are a symptom of political instability. These crises are often related to, among other factors, demands for self-determination and self-government; conflict related to identity and culture issues; opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state or to the internal or international policies of a government; or control of resources or territory¹⁸.

The United Nations reported that over 110,000 people were killed by flooding in Peru and Ecuador in 2025; that same year Mexico experienced temperatures exceeding 125 degrees Fahrenheit (approximately 52.7 degrees Celsius) and severe drought that left 85 percent of the country with a major water shortage¹⁹. In South America Andean countries such as Peru, Argentina, and Colombia, depend on the mountains' glaciers for freshwater access to support agriculture and hydroelectric industries, as well as to provide drinking water for 90 million people²⁰. For years, however, rapid glacier melting has resulted in higher risks of flooding and long-term water shortages, threatening water security for tens of millions of people. Tourism, a major industry in the Caribbean, is heavily impacted by extreme weather and natural disasters, leaving many Caribbean nations' economies extremely fragile in their aftermath. The agro-food industry, for example, can deepen food insecurity and threaten economic decline due to water shortages for crops and livestock. Such tremendous losses of life and infrastructure are devastating to industries and broader quality of life across the region and globally. Poorly managed relief, too, can stifle a country's path towards sustainable development, a priority for

¹⁸ Escola de Cultura de Pau. 2026. "Alert! Report on Conflicts, Human Rights and Peacebuilding." Escola de Cultura de Pau. <https://escolapau.uab.cat/en/publications/alert-report-on-conflicts-human-rights-and-peacebuilding-2/>.

¹⁹ UN News. 2026. "Extreme Heat, Floods and Drought Threaten Lives across Latin America and Caribbean." UN News, May 18. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/05/1167537>.

²⁰ Ibid.

UNECLAC. Recovery after natural disasters can take years to be realized, especially under corrupt or under resourced political leadership.

During this committee delegates are asked to examine how the countries in this region are impacted by both natural and sociopolitical disasters and what role the economy plays in their recovery. Whether human action is the direct cause or not, the Member States of UNECLAC must establish protection systems and policies to respond to natural hazards and abrupt changes in governance. The committee should consider how countries can dedicate resources and efforts towards relief in the face of crises that sit at the intersection of climate change, financial growth, and sociopolitical stability.

History:

Even prior to the arrival of European colonial powers, natural disasters and extreme weather have been a standard fixture in Latin America and the Caribbean and peoples of that region developed systems to protect themselves and their lands from their impact. The Taino and Kalinago, indigenous peoples of the Greater and Lesser Antilles, respectively, grew root crops like yucca and cassava root during hurricane seasons because they were more resilient to the high wind forces. Settlements were built inland, away from the coast; the Calusa Native Americans in what is now southwest Florida protected their homes and communities by using trees as windbreaks²¹. These practices were later taught to the European colonizers who arrived in the region unprepared to face such intense tropical storms. Under colonization, however, indigenous settlements were displaced and European settlements were established along the coast, which allowed for easier port access for ships carrying goods and slaves. The heartier, weather-resistant crops were pushed out in place of plantation cash crops like sugarcane and tobacco, and the once protected communities became vulnerable to flooding and damage from the heavy rains.

Colonizers also implemented slave-based land policies and changes that stripped economic, social, and political power from local populations. European landowners had sole legal claim to the land, and locals instead were often forced to pay rent to landlords or were

²¹ Florida Center for Instructional Technology. 2002. "The Calusa: 'The Shell Indians.'" Fcit.Usf.Edu. <https://fcit.usf.edu/florida/lessons/calusa/calusa1.htm>.

forced to move onto smaller, more disaster-prone and hazardous areas where they lived in “chattel houses”: poorly constructed, cheap, and ill-regulated housing structures. Post-colonial efforts to reclaim and redistribute former plantations and estates by independent island governments in the 1960s and 1970s were largely unsuccessful, and the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the disaster recovery capacity in the region. In Barbuda and other English-speaking former colonies, under crown land policies – legal standards established under colonialism – no individual born on the island has the right to own land, and all land without a land grant is considered communally owned²². In 2017, Hurricane Maria devastated the island of Barbuda but, because of crown land policies, many Barbudans lacked housing insurance and access to credit and development support to rebuild their homes due to not owning titles or deeds to their property²³.

In February 2010, Chile was struck by an 8.8 magnitude earthquake which triggered a tsunami with wave heights exceeding 95 feet. The destruction was immense; 521 people were reported dead, 46 were presumed dead or missing, with \$30 billion USD in infrastructure and material damages. The earthquake hit during a period of political transition for Chile: then-President Michelle Bachelet was days away from stepping down from office to make way for President-elect Sebastian Piñera. Despite the numbers, the devastation was greatly reduced by Chile’s disaster management systems. Evacuation and pre-event preparedness were led Chile Navy’s Hydrographic Service (SHOA), Chile disaster management agency (ONEMI) and backed by Chile’s longstanding political stability, which helped the country prepare and recover through its early tsunami and earthquake warning systems, widespread national education around disaster preparedness, earthquake-resilient structures, and well-trained police and fire responders²⁴. The Bachelet administration also deployed over 10,000 troops to maintain peace and direct recovery efforts in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. Before her transition, Bachelet also requested

²² Nibbs, Farah. 2024. “Colonialism’s Legacy Has Left Caribbean Nations Much More Vulnerable to Hurricanes.” *The Conversation*, October 22. <https://theconversation.com/colonialisms-legacy-has-left-caribbean-nations-much-more-vulnerable-to-hurricanes-231913>.

²³ Mohammed, Kenneth. 2023. “‘Billionaire Club’: The Tiny Island of Barbuda Braces for Decision on Land Rights and Nature.” *The Guardian*, November 6. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/26/billionaire-club-the-tiny-island-of-barbuda-braces-for-decision-on-land-rights-and-nature>.

²⁴ Fukuji, Tammy. 2019. “27 February 2010, MW 8.8, Off Central Chile - International Tsunami Information Center.” *Ioc-Unesco.Org*. https://legacy.itic.ioc-unesco.org/legacy.itic.ioc-unesco.org/index7d2a.html?option=com_content&view=article&id=1667&Itemid=2974.

aid from the United Nations, European Union, and other countries, including Argentina and the United States. This aid came in the form of nearly 30 tons of food, satellite telephones, emergency response personnel across various disciplines, and emergency field hospitals²⁵. The Piñera administration immediately focused on reconstruction and recovery; in the months that followed 50,000 temporary homes had been built and housing subsidies were extended to those who were without shelter. By 2014, infrastructure repairs to highways, airports, and buildings, along with a 220,000 home-rebuilding project were completed and the country was largely in a state of recovery and stability²⁶. The rapid response and focus of Chile's political leadership, coupled with the country's disaster risk management systems, helped prevent greater devastation to the country.

Comparatively, the 2010 Haiti Earthquake is one of the most notorious examples of a nation impacted by a natural disaster, whose devastation was compounded by political corruption and instability that greatly disrupted recovery efforts. Unlike Chile, Haiti lacked an earthquake early warning system and was ill-equipped to respond to the earthquake's destruction, despite having a National Disaster Risk Management System in place (SNGRD). 200,000 people were killed and 1.5 million people were displaced. Of the casualties, approximately 20% of federal employees were lost and a quarter of federal government buildings were destroyed, along with most of the island's infrastructure. This sweeping loss of life left the government understaffed, under resourced, and unorganized to have any meaningful immediate response. The total cost of damages to the country were approximated at 20% of Haiti's GDP²⁷. To support recovery, over \$9 billion USD was sent to the country through public and private donations.

Haiti also received an influx of physical and political aid meant to help guide the country through recovery to a greater state of stability, however this aid ultimately ended up facilitating corruption and additional health crises that further crippled the country. The United Nations, for example, deployed a peacekeeping mission that resulted in a cholera epidemic that killed 10,000 Haitians and infected 82,000 more, despite Haiti having no prior history of cholera on the island.

²⁵ UN News. 2010. "UN Assisting Chile in Aftermath of Massive Quake." UN News, March 1. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2010/03/330912>.

²⁶ Pallardy, Richard, and John P. Rafferty. 2019. "Chile Earthquake of 2010 - Reconstruction." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Chile-earthquake-of-2010/Reconstruction>.

²⁷ Lam, Wallace. 2020. "Disaster Recovery Comparison: Earthquakes in Chile & Haiti." Vision of Humanity, October 16. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/how-positive-peace-makes-a-difference-during-a-disaster/>.

It took over half of a decade for the UN to acknowledge its role in the outbreak, though it failed to deliver on promises of compensation and healthcare aid for victims²⁸. In late 2010, Haiti held a presidential election; the United States, via then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, pushed for the election of Michel “Sweet Micky” Martelly over other leading candidates. This political interference contributed to a sociopolitical crisis. Martelly’s administration was marked by immense corruption; \$2 billion USD of the financial aid received for infrastructure repairs and public health needs were embezzled and to, this day, the majority of Haiti’s general population received little to none of the funding or resources extended to the country following the earthquake²⁹.

The juxtaposition of Chile and Haiti’s responses to their respective earthquake disasters and the subsequent sociopolitical fallout are reflective of the ranged, in some ways imbalanced, capacities seen across the region. In 2015, UNECLAC debuted the Sustainable Development and Disaster Unit³⁰, a digital repository of resources, curated multimedia tools, and disaster preparedness and response workshops to reinforce Latin American and Caribbean leadership’s expertise in areas of disaster risk assessment and post-disaster needs analysis³¹. The Commission also led a study assessing the effectiveness of its recovery efforts in closing the gap in damage and loss reimbursements to disaster-impacted countries³². In December 2024, the United Nations adopted Resolution A/C.6/79/L.16³³, which set the stage for negotiations towards a formal treaty committed to protecting people affected by disasters, acknowledging the heightened emergencies of disasters occurring in conflict zones, areas affected by war and political violence. UNECLAC

²⁸ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2020. “UN Inaction Denies Justice for Haiti Cholera Victims, Say UN Experts.” Ohchr, April 30. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/04/un-inaction-denies-justice-haiti-cholera-victims-say-un-experts>.

²⁹ Katz, Jonathan M. 2021. “Haiti’s Earthquake Has Compounded Years of Corruption and Political Crisis | Jonathan M Katz.” The Guardian, August 26. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2021/aug/26/haiti-earthquake-corruption-political-crisis>.

³⁰ United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2015. “ECLAC’s New Disaster Unit to Provide Assistance to Entire Latin America and Caribbean Region.” United Nations, March 11. <https://www.cepal.org/en/news/eclacs-new-disaster-unit-provide-assistance-entire-latin-america-and-caribbean-region>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² International Recovery Platform, Winston Moore, and Willard Phillips. 2014. “Review of ECLAC Damage and Loss Assessments in the Caribbean.” Preventionweb.Net, August 31. <https://recovery.preventionweb.net/publication/documents-and-publications/review-eclac-damage-and-loss-assessments-caribbean>.

³³ Batallas, Carlos. 2024. “When Disasters Strike, the World Still Wings It | IE Insights.” IE Insights, December 20. <https://www.ie.edu/insights/articles/when-disasters-strike-the-world-still-wings-it/>.

recognizes disaster preparedness as the strongest strategy for establishing disaster recovery systems in its efforts towards sustainable development, region-wide economic and political stability and self-sufficiency, and protection in the face of climate change.

Analysis:

Natural disasters are expensive. Sociopolitical crises are expensive. This committee should consider how natural disasters and sociopolitical crises overlap and complicate each other, as well as what kind of tools and resources are needed to address both. The cost of recovery is more than just economic, though the financial burden is often immense for smaller, less wealthy counties. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction notes that these smaller nations experience some of the highest levels of economic damage, disproportionate with their sizes, losing an average of 3% of their GDP annually between 1980 and 2018. In 2017 Hurricane Maria tore through islands across the Caribbean, costing Dominica, which has a population of less than 66,000 people, 220% of its GDP.³⁴ Between 1965 and 2020 Bolivia alone experienced 84 extreme weather events and natural disasters, ranging from wildfires to droughts, landslides, and heatwaves, equal to roughly \$3.7 billion, or 9% of its GDP, in damages. Argentina experienced unprecedented losses to its agriculture sector from 2020-2023 due to droughts; there was a 45% drop in its production of wheat, soybeans, and corn, which are major staple crops exported globally. In total, the country lost \$20 billion USD to climate change's impact and its agri-food sector, as well as the countries it traded with, suffered as a result.³⁵ Brazil, Suriname, Peru, and Colombia are among South America's most flooding prone countries; since 2000, flooding has cost over \$1 billion USD in damages. The World Bank reported in 2014 that at least 70% of the Caribbean population lives along the coasts, exposed to flooding from rising sea levels. Many of the colonial-era port cities became political and commercial capitols; the same report listed Castries, St. Lucia; St. Georges, Grenada; and Kingstown, St Vincent as examples of cities whose populations and infrastructure were

³⁴ Koop, Fermín. 2023. "Explainer: Disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean, and How to Reduce Risks." Dialogue Earth, October 10. <https://dialogue.earth/en/climate/381558-explainer-disasters-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-and-how-to-reduce-risks-2/>.

³⁵ Chiummiento, Juan. 2023. "La Niña Ends, but Drought Exposes Deeper Problems for Argentina." Dialogue Earth, June 6. <https://dialogue.earth/en/climate/370215-la-nina-ends-but-drought-exposes-deeper-problems-for-argentina/>.

especially at risk due to rising sea levels³⁶. When such economic centers are damaged, it threatens the financial and economic well-being of the countries as well. The committee should consider the responsibilities of non-Latin American and Caribbean nations to prevent and respond to climate change-driven disasters and engage in climate risk management as the region experiences the consequences of their actions.

There is also the human, material, and environmental cost that is often much harder to recover in the aftermath. These losses ultimately affect the less tangible, but equally important aspects of life in the region. High death tolls impact industries and labor pools, as seen with Haiti's government offices after the 2010 earthquake, not to mention the emotional loss and impact on national morale. Loss of housing, schools, hospitals, farmland, and the like all have ripple effects that are visible and damaging long after the disaster has passed. In countries that lack strong central governments, funding, and long-term aid and support, this kind of damage can be insurmountable.

As already discussed in this background guide, Latin America and the Caribbean are geographically predisposed to natural disasters – while climate change has pushed these disasters to the extreme, they have always been an inevitable phenomenon. However, the high levels of poverty and social inequality that continue to plague the region make it especially *socially vulnerable* to these hazards and worsens their impact beyond just physical damage. UNECLAC, recognizing that pre-disaster preparation is one of the strongest strategies towards effective responses, has created the Disaster and Loss Assessment frameworks, an online portal that offers countries estimations of the macro and micro-costs of financial recovery and reconstruction, as well as estimations of the damages and losses of upcoming or recent disasters³⁷. Non-government entities are also leaders in recovery efforts in the region. CARE is a global nonprofit that provides community-based services in 121 different countries, including over 25 Caribbean and Latin American nations³⁸. Their work focuses on food and water access, public health,

³⁶World Bank Group. 2016. "Can You Imagine a Caribbean Minus Its Beaches? It's Not Science Fiction, It's Climate Change." World Bank, World Bank Group, August 30.

³⁷ Caribbean Development Program, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2019. "Catalogue of Services | Caribbean Development Portal." Eclac.Org. <https://caribbean.eclac.org/services>.

³⁸ CARE. "CARE's Work in the Caribbean - CARE." CARE. CARE.org, April 27, 2026. <https://www.care.org/our-work/where-we-work/caribbean/>.

economic growth, climate change, quality education, and ongoing conflict and crisis recovery; their programs offer guidance to combat suffering and provide support long term support in response to natural disaster and sociopolitical crises. As a non-profit, however, CARE depends heavily on network and foundational support to fund and maintain its programs and recognizes that alone cannot sustain the support needed to truly mitigate these issues on a global scale. The Dominican Republic's intense deportation campaign and growing instances of gang violence across the island have led to over 25,000 Haitians being displaced over the past two years. CARE runs multiple projects meant to provide material aid through hygiene kits, food assistance, cash transfers, and protection services and transportation, all of which help ease the burden of migrants suddenly forced to reintegrate, sometimes without the proper documentation to return to Haiti. The armed control of the gangs over highways and public roads has made aid delivery more difficult, however.

In crisis management and recovery, CARE's approach looks at preparedness and immediate response strategies. One of its strongest crisis recovery programs is Cash and Voucher Assistance, which provide impacted families and individuals, mainly girls and women, with crucial financial support. The organization also aims to create a "flexible humanitarian surge fund" as a measure towards long-term recovery. Although it already has an existing Humanitarian Surge Fund, this strengthened version would circumvent traditional fundraising patterns following a crisis by allowing CARE and its partners to access the reserve with short notice, deploy rapid-response teams, extend millions of dollars towards long-term rehabilitation for housing, socioeconomic, and public health recovery, and pour at least \$30,000-\$200,000 into initial crisis interventions. The program also allows CARE's teams to work directly in communities to develop disaster preparation and mitigation plans, akin to what was practiced in Chile in 2010. CARE's funding also goes into crisis response team staff training and maintaining supplies for long-running crises that may not receive the same public attention as they previously had³⁹.

In January 2026, the United States government launched attacks across the Venezuelan city of Caracas and apprehended then-President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores on

³⁹ CARE. 2024. "Humanitarian Surge Fund Report 12-24." December.
https://www.globalgiving.org/pfil/60918/Humanitarian_Surge_Fund_report_1224.pdf.

charges of drug crimes and terrorism. The U.S. government later confirmed that gaining control of the country's oil as an additional motivation for the attack and continued its implementation of the hundreds of sanctions the U.S. has enforced against the country since 2006. While the sanctions were initially enacted in response to U.S. concerns over Maduro's reign and accusations of human rights violations and corruption, they have continued to escalate. In 2025 the U.S. launched a military-enforced oil tanker blockade that the United Nations condemned as an illegal act of armed aggression that violated the human right to life and other rights in Venezuela under the Articles 24 and 51 in the UN Charter.⁴⁰ Maduro's replacement, his former Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, was installed with U.S.-backing, and it is broadly considered unlikely that a democratic election will take place anytime soon. Prior to the United States' intervention, Venezuela under Maduro's rule saw countless instances of disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and the political oppression and persecution of those deemed to be political opposition to the Maduro administration. Civic protests and demonstrations were frequently countered with military force, sometimes deadly; political prisoners were withheld from access to healthcare and communication with the outside world, violating their human rights⁴¹. In 2026 the United Nations Human Rights Council conducted an independent investigation that found that even under the new Presidential administration, the country's political oppression systems have remained intact, and Venezuelans continue to face human rights threats, poverty, and intimidation by state-backed security, intelligence, and military powers. Maduro's abrupt arrest and the United States' increasing interference directly contribute to the sociopolitical crisis and the persistence of these repressive institutions⁴².

For months Cuba has been suffering through an ongoing sociopolitical and economic crisis driven by U.S. sanctions and fuel blockades. These economic pressures have worsened the quality of life so severely that United Nations experts have condemned the United States' actions

⁴⁰ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2025. "UN Experts Condemn United States Blockade and Aggression against Venezuela." Ohchr, December 24. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/un-experts-condemn-united-states-blockade-and-aggression-against-venezuela>.

⁴¹ OHCHR. 2025. "Venezuela: Harsh Repression and Crimes against Humanity Ongoing Fact-Finding Mission Says." March 18. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/venezuela-harsh-repression-and-crimes-against-humanity-ongoing-fact-finding>.

⁴² UN News. 2026b. "Repression Continues in Venezuela in the Face of 'Appalling' Human Rights Violations." UN News, September 16. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/09/1168351>.

as causing a humanitarian crisis⁴³ on the island. The causes of this disaster are multifaceted and tied to both domestic policy choices and external pressures. The United States has sought regime change and the end of communism in Cuba for decades and has implemented sanctions against the country and any allies in its attempts to bring about this change. Throughout 2026, it has increased these efforts significantly. Venezuela is one of the major oil suppliers to the island, but the U.S.'s sanctions against Venezuela and blockades preventing fuel from foreign nations from entering Cuba have effectively left Cuba struggling to maintain even its basic services. Since March 2026 the island has experienced constant nationwide blackouts that sometimes last for days. Since that month, Cuba's national electric grid - failing infrastructure that was implemented decades prior but not effectively maintained by the country's government - has collapsed completely on six occasions. The fuel blockade has limited the island's fuel reserves, leaving sanitation services, public health centers and hospitals, businesses, grocery stores, schools, and homes unable to function without electricity or fuel⁴⁴. The U.S. has also enforced a trade embargo and heavy sanctions against Cuban state-run businesses, the Cuban government, and foreign enterprises on the island, resulting in severe shortages of medical supplies, food, and water as the island becomes increasingly unable to accept foreign aid (and as said foreign aid is disincentivized from extending support). This crisis, exacerbated to extremes by the U.S. government's economic pressures, are sustained by the Cuban's government's failure to effectively pivot after losses of crucial economic and social support following the fall of the Soviet Union and other Latin American allies.

Along with material aid and activism in support of the Cuban people, nationwide recovery from such a crisis depends on change at the highest levels. In September 2026, the Harvard Working Group on Cuba's Future, a joint effort by the Harvard University Cuban Studies Program and Afro-Latin American Research Institute released a report positing how internal policy changes between the Cuban and American governments could put an end to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and give Cuba a path forward to self-determination and economic and social stability. Some of its recommendations include lifting the trade embargo and fuel

⁴³ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2026. "Ohchr." Ohchr. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/08/cuba-un-experts-condemn-new-us-sanctions-humanitarian-crisis-deepens>.

⁴⁴ Guzman, Chad de, and Miranda Jeyaretnam. 2026. "The Crisis in Cuba, Explained." TIME, Time, March 17. <https://time.com/article/2026/03/17/cuba-economic-energy-crisis-trump-us-explainer/>.

blockade that have notably contributed to much of the shortages and blackouts across the country; the Cuban government extending amnesty to its political prisoners and repealing laws that limit freedom of expression and speech, which have contributed to the emigration of Cubans from the island; and for U.S. and foreign involvement in Cuba to prioritize the economic support of the island's private sector, and allow the Cuban government to determine to what extent and how⁴⁵.

Natural disasters and sociopolitical crises are intertwined, and their consequences, ranging from environmental to economic, to physical and political are, above all else, human. Response and recovery efforts in their wake must be equally human focused to be effective. Strategic disaster response measures are preemptive and quick; while natural disasters cannot be avoided completely, and sociopolitical crises are often explosive and escalate amidst domestic and international reactions, preparation through widespread education and strong disaster risk management institutions can severely reduce their toll.

Conclusion:

Latin America and the Caribbean are, undoubtedly, resilient. Part of the mission of UNECLAC is to guide and strengthen the countries in this region to economic, social, and political prosperity and respond to large-scale environmental and sociopolitical crises in ways that are preventative and sustainable. The region's potential for economic growth and capacity for disaster response and recovery are wrapped up in histories and cultures shaped heavily by a colonial presence that is still felt today. It is worth considering, then, how (and if) former colonial powers and larger, more established nations, can meaningfully support the region to achieve UNECLAC's goals. Do they have a responsibility to the region to reduce their environmental impact, given that they are the largest contributors to climate change while Latin America and the Caribbean bear the brunt of the consequences? Do the traces of colonialism in the region's cultures and political systems still have merit, or are they hinderances to true self-sustainability and economic growth for communities across Latin America and the Caribbean?

⁴⁵ Mendoza, Luis Felipe. 2026. "Harvard's Blueprint for Cuba's Survival and Future." ColombiaOne: News from Colombia and the World, September 22. <https://colombiaone.com/2026/09/22/harvard-cuba-report-2026/>.

UNECLAC has launched several projects help Latin American and Caribbean nations to respond to natural disasters using research and education, with its most effective focus being first on risk preparedness, then relief and recovery. Training and education for response teams and the general population, well-funded fiscal reserves, and ongoing maintenance of humanitarian aid are just some of the strategies proven to have the most promise. The challenge is how to equitably implement these projects across the region and how to train and back government leaders with the resources to do so. There are examples across the region, as seen by Chile, in how inter-institutional collaboration can effectively reduce the damage of natural disasters. As climate change continues to worsen and the devastation of natural disasters increases, the region is dependent upon strong, comprehensive risk management systems to preserve life and infrastructure. Implementing these risk management and response efforts, however, depends on political stability across all sectors – government, healthcare, first responder systems, and education. When external interferences cause or exacerbate sociopolitical crises, as seen in Cuba currently, or in Haiti in 2010, how can the committee protect the vulnerable communities who are directly affected? The committee should consider strategies to ensure leadership is equipped and accountable to its people and to maintain growth and stability in times of extreme and sudden political change with respect to each country's sovereignty and needs.

By nature, the relationship between natural disaster and sociopolitical crises response and recovery is complicated, and there may not be a perfect solution that can be achieved through UNECLAC alone. However, this committee remains a crucial platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, a region that is often sidelined on the global stage. It is the responsibility of the delegates in this committee to determine the best paths forward within the scope of this committee and its Member States to respond to, and recover from, the crises facing the region.

Questions to Consider:

1. What methods should UNECLAC pursue and seek global support for short vs long-term disaster relief?
 - a. Should resources be dedicated more to short-term solutions and aid or long-term rebuilding and infrastructure?
2. How should the Commission prioritize addressing natural and sociopolitical disasters in the Latin America and Caribbean regions?

- a. Can these issues be considered, and therefore resolved, separately, or are they related?
3. Should UNECLAC encourage member nations that have faced sociopolitical disasters to seek reparations from the nations who caused or exacerbated them? Consider the Cuban and Venezuelan blockades as examples.

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