

## IN BRIEF

# SAFE CITIES AND SAFE PUBLIC SPACES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Photo: UN Women/Johis Alarcon

## What's the Issue?

Across the world, women and girls fear and experience various types of sexual violence in public spaces, from unwelcome sexual remarks and touching to rape and femicide. It happens on streets, in and around schools, public transportation, workplaces, parks, public toilets and other spaces in urban, rural, online, and conflict/post conflict settings. Women's and girls' experience of sexual harassment was further exacerbated during the [global pandemic](#).

This reality reduces women's and girls' freedom of movement. It reduces their ability to participate in school, work and public life. It limits their access to essential services and their enjoyment of cultural and recreational activities, and negatively impacts their health and well-being.

In 2013, the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women (CSW57) identified various forms of sexual violence against women and girls (SVAWG) in public spaces as a distinct area of concern and called on governments to prevent it. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set "the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres" as one of its specific goals (Target 5.2).

*Photo: Women's rights/safe city partners take to the streets in Ecuador in pursuit of cities free of sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls.*

In 2016, the New Urban Agenda committed to promote a safe, healthy, inclusive, and secure environment in cities and human settlements for all to live, work, and participate in urban life without fear of violence and intimidation.

In 2025, the Beijing +30 Action Agenda was adopted to advance the goals of the Beijing Declaration, calling for zero violence against women and girls everywhere including online.

## Our Solutions

UN Women's Global Initiative "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls" builds on its "Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls" Global Programme that began implementation in January 2011 to prevent and respond to SVAWG in public spaces. It supports local and national governments to address multiple sustainable development goal targets across multiple goals.



**SAFE CITIES  
AND SAFE  
PUBLIC SPACES**

UN WOMEN GLOBAL FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME

City partners commit to:

- 1. Identify gender-responsive locally relevant and owned interventions.** Conducting a scoping study is essential as it provides specific data to ensure a deep understanding of local forms of SVAWG in public spaces. Multiple stakeholders reflect on the conclusions to validate the scoping study results and co-create programmes that respond to the findings of the study and build joint accountability.
- 2. Develop and effectively implement comprehensive laws and policies to prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces.** Through capacity building, awareness raising, community mobilization and other strategies, authorities, grassroots women and community partners are equipped to advocate, develop, and monitor the effective implementation of laws and policies, and to make sure that accompanying resources are in place to support this action.
- 3. Investments in the safety and economic viability of public spaces.** A gender-responsive approach to urban and transportation planning ensures that the needs of all women and men are taken into account across different municipal departments. This includes public infrastructure (investments in safe potable water, improved sanitation, lighting, digital connectivity, creation of market stalls). It also includes provision of training on financial literacy and economic development, focusing on opportunities for women's empowerment.
- 4. Change social norms in order to promote women's and girls' rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence. Working on institutional and systemic social norms change required for gender equality.** Girls, boys and other influential champions are engaged in transformative action in schools and other settings to promote respectful relationships, gender equality, and safety in public spaces.

UN Women is a strong technical partner in city led programmes. At global level, a package of tools is available which can be adapted to context. In collaboration with partners across cities, UN Women facilitates a Global Community of Practice (COP). The COP includes an in-person biennial Global Leaders' Forum (2011-2025), ongoing seminars, and city to city exchanges that enhance knowledge of multi-stakeholders on emerging trends and informs the development of accelerator interventions on safe public spaces.

#### BOX 1

##### Facts and figures - sexual violence against women

- A 2024 study conducted on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the United States found that 32% of women experienced some form of sexual harassment in the past year (Raj A et al. 2024).
- A study conducted across five regions found that 65% of women parliamentarians reported that they have experienced sexist remarks, primarily by male colleagues in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016).
- In Chile, a recent survey found that 84% of participants had experienced harassment in public spaces and on public or private transport (Arenas and Madrid, 2021).

#### BOX 2

##### Some Achievements

- Evaluations of comprehensive safe city programmes reveal an improved sense of safety and hygiene and comfort among women and girls in markets and safety in public transport in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, a reduction in the prevalence of sexual harassment in public transport and a significant increase of bystander willingness to support women during sexual harassment incidents occurring in public transport in Quito, Ecuador, and increase in women and girls' autonomous ability in Cairo Egypt, by contributing to women's access to work, security, education, social networks, and leisure.
- As part of an integrated approach to create safe rural spaces with women and girls, community meetings, training sessions, health clinics, art competitions, and football tournaments were held as part of a community mobilization strategy and campaign interventions focused on women's health, safety and wellness in Assam, India, with over 13,133 women workers reached across 10 tea gardens.

## Where we work

### At local, national and regional levels:

Government partners across different sectors (economic development, urban and transport planning/infrastructure, women's machinery, justice, police, health, climate/environment, education, housing, sanitation, technology and innovation, etc.); grassroots women's, youth, and men's groups, research organizations, UN agencies, media, and the private sector, etc.

### At the global level:

Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, the Huairou Commission, Saftipin, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, the International Association of Public Transport, UN-Habitat, UNOPS, UNESCO, and other agencies.

## Participating cities in the global initiative:

- New Delhi and Jabalpur, **India**
- Kigali and Nyaruguru District, **Rwanda**
- Port Moresby, **Papua New Guinea**
- Quito, Cuenca, Guayaquil, and Ibarra, **Ecuador**
- Cairo and Alexandria, **Egypt**
- Cape Town, **South Africa**
- Marrakesh, Rabat, Fez, and Agadir, **Morocco**
- Heredia, **Costa Rica**
- Kericho, **Kenya**
- Harare, **Zimbabwe**
- San Miguel District, Lima, **Peru**
- Quezon City, the **Philippines**
- Ho Chi Minh and Da Nang, **Viet Nam**
- Hawassa, Addis Ababa and Shashamane, **Ethiopia**

- Banja Luka, **Bosnia and Herzegovina**
- Rubizhne, **Ukraine**
- Chisinau, **Moldova**
- Guatemala City and Livingston, **Guatemala**
- El Alto, La Paz, and Santa Cruz (Districts of Montero and Warnes), **Bolivia**
- Montevideo and Canelones, **Uruguay**
- Mexico City and Monterrey, **Mexico**
- San Salvador, **El Salvador**
- Dakar, **Senegal**
- Zanzibar, **Tanzania**
- Medellin, Bogota, Villavicencio, Cali, Popayan, Pasto, and Barranquilla, **Colombia**
- Tunis, **Tunisia**
- Niamey, **Niger**
- Peshawar City, **Pakistan**

### Cities participating from the global north:

- Dublin, **Ireland**
- New York and Chicago, **United States**
- Sakai, **Japan**
- Brussels, **Belgium**
- Winnipeg (jointly with), the Province of Manitoba  
Edmonton, (jointly with) the Province of Alberta, London,  
Vancouver, Montreal, Halifax, Ottawa, and Calgary, **Canada**
- Madrid, **Spain**
- London, **United Kingdom**
- Geneva, **Switzerland**

**More cities to be announced in 2025 and 2026.**

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UN Women exists to advance women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As the lead UN entity on gender equality, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviours and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. We keep the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.

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