

# Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces

## GLOBAL RESULTS REPORT



SAFE CITIES  
AND SAFE  
PUBLIC SPACES

UN WOMEN GLOBAL FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME





UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



UN Women works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls.

# FOREWORD

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When women and girls are not safe walking on city streets, selling their goods or shopping in marketplaces, commuting on public transport or simply using community toilets, it has a massive impact on their lives. Both the threat and the experience of violence affect their access to social activities, education, employment and leadership opportunities.

Sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in public spaces are present in every country, in rural areas as well as cities, and even in online spaces. We know from a study in Rabat, Morocco that 92 per cent of women had experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime. In Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, more than half the women vendors had experienced some form of violence in the local markets; and similarly in Kigali, Rwanda, a baseline study showed that 55 per cent of women were concerned about their safety when going to educational institutions after dark.

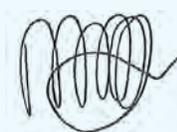
Quantifying these issues and understanding the nature of gender-based violence puts into perspective the urgency of providing effective, comprehensive solutions. UN Women's Global Flagship Programme Initiative Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces, supported by over 15 donors from public and private sectors, is helping to increase the number of cities and public settings that have safe and empowering spaces for women and girls. The Initiative currently spans 27 cities from developed and developing countries. It focuses on the development of locally-owned human-rights and evidence-based initiatives ending violence against women and girls, and supporting women's political participation and economic empowerment.

This inaugural global report presents results across the initiative's "champion" cities – from Cairo to Kigali, Winnipeg to Quito, and New Delhi to Sakai. It stresses the need for comprehensive laws and policies that prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces, and highlights some of the encouraging initiatives that are already yielding results. For example, champion cities Dublin and Quito recognized the need to revamp their urban design to make public spaces inclusive, secure, and responsive to the needs of women and men, while Port Moresby and Kigali prioritized women market vendors' safety through

improvements in infrastructure and the creation of safe spaces in which women could sell their goods. Quezon City harnessed the power of technology with a "hackathon" to encourage the development of mobile technology solutions to map sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in public spaces, and in Marrakech, more than 1,500 bus drivers were trained to prevent and respond to sexual harassment against women and girls.

Efforts like these are helping cities to tackle the normalization of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence, especially for women and girls living in the poorest neighborhoods, or who are targeted because of their race, ethnicity, age, disability or sexual orientation. As the New Urban Agenda proposes, we need to see action from multiple stakeholders and partners, including first responders like police forces, and to connect our shared vision across cities with a common framework that can be adapted to the local context. This is critical to delivering on our mandate to champion the rights of all women and girls, as well as on the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in particular, Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

By providing specific examples of solutions from cities around the world, I hope that this report will continue to advance the international knowledge base on the prevention of violence against women, challenge the normalization of such violence, and inspire action from many more communities to ensure safe, empowering, sustainable cities for all.



**Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**

*UN Under-Secretary-General and  
Executive Director of UN Women*

# MAKING CITIES AND PUBLIC SPACES SAFE FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

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All around the world, women and girls face sexual harassment and other forms of violence in public spaces. In many cities, a large majority of women and girls have experienced some form of violation, ranging from unwanted sexual remarks or groping to rape and gender-related killings.



These occur in any of a number of places – on buses and trains, in streets, at markets and parks, and many others. They are common in developing and developed countries, in urban and rural areas.

As a result, many women and girls do not enjoy the right to freedom of movement. Opportunities for work and education suffer. Access to services and enjoyment of culture and recreation are constrained. Poor women and girls as well as those belonging to socially stigmatized groups are among the most vulnerable to risk.

In private domains, such as homes, violence against women and girls is now widely recognized as a human rights violation. But violence in public spaces, especially sexual harassment, is still largely tolerated and perceived as a “normal” part of social life. This reflects discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequality. They

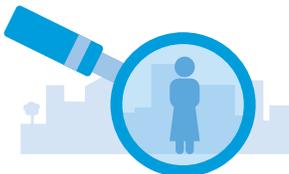
**ABOVE: Global momentum has grown from transforming public spaces in 27 “champion” cities, including here in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.**

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impede the recognition, prevention and adequate response to sexual violence against women and girls.

Through its Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces global flagship initiative, UN Women since November 2010 has galvanized global and local partners to transform public spaces in 27 “champion” cities. Global momentum has steadily grown since. In 2013, the UN Commission on the Status of Women identified sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces as a distinct area of concern, and called on governments to take preventive measures. This call was further affirmed in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

Cities participating in UN Women’s global flagship initiative commit to ensuring that women and girls are socially, economically and politically empowered in public spaces that are free from sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. Data, policies, investments and advocacy are essential components of comprehensive strategies to prevent and respond to sexual violence against women. Strategies include four closely integrated categories of interventions implemented by local and national authorities, grassroots women/women’s organizations and other community partners.



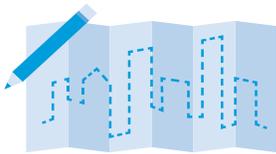
**KEY OUTCOME 1:  
GENERATE EVIDENCE,  
BUILD PARTNERSHIPS  
FOR CHANGE**

Initial scoping studies provide specific and often unique data to ensure a deep understanding of sexual harassment and violence in public spaces. Key stakeholders reflect on the findings, which become the basis for further action.



**KEY OUTCOME 2:  
DEVELOP AND  
IMPLEMENT  
COMPREHENSIVE  
LAWS AND POLICIES**

These must be specifically oriented around preventing and responding to sexual violence in public spaces. Capacity-building and awareness-raising help local authorities, women’s groups and community partners advocate legislation and monitor application, including through the dedication of adequate resources.



**KEY OUTCOME 3:  
INVEST IN THE  
SAFETY AND  
ECONOMIC VIABILITY  
OF PUBLIC SPACES**

A gender approach to urban planning means systematically accounting for the different needs of women and men. Greater safety for women and girls may come through specific investments in public infrastructure, such as for safe water and better lighting. Economic development strategies expand opportunities for women.



**KEY OUTCOME 4:  
TRANSFORM  
SOCIAL NORMS**

Transformative activities in schools, communities and other settings raise awareness of gender equality and promote respectful gender relationships and safety in public spaces.

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Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces is one of the core partnership initiatives in action used by UN Women to achieve its 2018-2021 strategic plan objective of more cities and other settings having safe and empowering public spaces for women and girls. The following presents achievements to date from around the world. It places particular emphasis on the results achieved in the four outcome areas above. Common to all programmes is that the issue of sexual harassment and its impact on women’s safety in public spaces, is more visible, with comprehensive approaches being put into action.



# GENERATE EVIDENCE, BUILD PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHANGE

## HO CHI MINH, VIET NAM

Like a number of other cities across the world, Ho Chi Minh, the largest city in Viet Nam, has started to break the longstanding silence on sexual harassment and violence in public spaces. Engaging with diverse stakeholders is an initial step in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

A police officer described a particular strategy used by perpetrators: “When groups of female friends hang out with each other in public spaces, two or three men will pretend to chase each other and accidentally bump into them (women), touching them in inappropriate ways.”

Women often fear violence when moving around the city. A manager at a university said: “Girls are afraid to go out and travel through public spaces, thus limiting their access to services and learning. Sexual harassment and violence have a major mental

and emotional impact on survivors. Sometimes girls might not have experienced it but just hearing of experiences shared by their peers, or cases in newspapers, makes them fearful. I don’t dare allow my 13-year-old daughter to go out at night. I have to constantly tell her to be careful.”

While all women can experience sexual harassment and violence in public spaces, women with disabilities often face additional risks. One woman shared how she has seen a woman with a disability who sells lottery tickets on the street, and is often sexually harassed by her boss. “He distributes lottery tickets to all other people in time, but doesn’t give her any, keeping them in the drawer, locked up,” she recounts. “When everyone leaves, he then grabs her.”

Sexual harassment and violence are fast-growing problems even in virtual spaces. A female student in Ho Chi Minh City described receiving social media invitations to sex chats, requiring her to block them.

These are just some of the stories about sexual harassment and violence reported as part of a scoping study conducted in 2016. It provides evidence for identifying gender-responsive interventions under the “Ho Chi Minh Safe and Friendly City and Public Spaces for Women, Youth and Children Programme.” The programme involves a partnership between UN Women and the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, and is informed by the voices of diverse stakeholders.

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews for the scoping study revealed the extent and nature of

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**—MANAGER AT A UNIVERSITY**



**The Ho Chi Minh Safe City programme has now been designated a key component of the city action plan to implement the National Thematic Project on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response (2016-2020).**

sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces in Ho Chi Minh City. They happen in many different public spaces, including streets, and on buses and other modes of public transportation. Occurrences are also common at swimming pools, public toilets, universities, schools, beer clubs, movie halls, gym centres and bars.

Most people ignore sexual harassment against women and girls, and as a result don't report or respond to it. Many see it as inevitable; it is often normalized by men and women, a tendency exacerbated by the lack of legal sanction. Patriarchal norms viewing women's domain as within the home and reinforcing male privilege are consistent drivers of violations.

A series of interactive workshops deliberated on the findings of the study and helped to begin defining priority interventions. The Ho Chi Minh Safe City programme has now been designated a key component of the city action plan to implement the National Thematic Project on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response (2016-2020). Programme partners will now conduct a baseline study that will include indicators linked to Interventions in order to track results over time.

**ABOVE: Through scoping studies, city partners have a better understanding to what extent is sexual harassment a problem in a particular area of a city, where does it occur, and what can be done to end it.**



## CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town has adapted the Global Framework of the Flagship Initiative in the pilot community of Atlantis, bringing together community partners to work on issues of crime and violence. Local authorities have conducted a scoping study on sexual harassment and violence against women, including an environmental safety assessment and a stake-

holder consultation process. The process was unkept, dirty and unwelcoming, and with walls that obstruct people from view in public space.

## RABAT, MOROCCO

A study to inform Rabat's Safe City Programme found that 92 per cent of women had experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime. The majority of men said they had at least once in

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