



COVID-19
RESPONSE



COVID-19 and Ensuring Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls

Photo: Ariel Silva/ CDMX

INTRODUCTION

The brief highlights emerging trends and implications for women and girls' safety in cities and public spaces, recognizing the continuum of violence against women and girls in private and public spaces throughout different phases of the pandemic.

It provides examples of concrete action taken at the local level in partnership with governments, grassroots women and women's rights organizations, the private sector and other partners, including from cities participating in the [UN Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship Initiative](#), and in particular from cities where the disease is widespread. The brief includes recommendations to be considered by governments, international

organizations, women's rights and other civil society organizations.

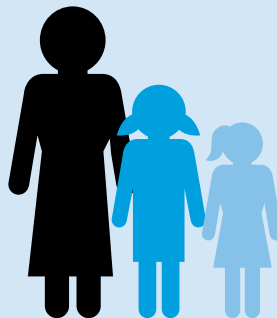
It is a living document that complements other policy briefs prepared by UN Women on COVID-19 and ending violence against women. It draws upon the knowledge and experience of a wide range of experts who support solutions to end sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in urban, rural and online settings, attentive to the country context in which the crisis is occurring.



COVID-19 AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SPACES

WOMEN AND GIRLS EXPERIENCE AND FEAR VARIOUS TYPES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN DIFFERENT PUBLIC SPACES

- In Canada, **ONE IN THREE WOMEN** are subjected to unwanted sexual behaviour in public spacesⁱ
- In India, more than **TWO THIRDS** of young women, adolescent girls and men feel that rural village public spaces are unsafe for women after darkⁱⁱ



- In Cuenca, Ecuador **90%** of women living in urban areas have experienced some form of sexual harassment in the last 12 monthsⁱⁱⁱ
- In the European Union, **ONE IN TEN** women have experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15^{iv}

During COVID-19, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women continue to occur on streets, in parks, on transport, and online



- In Chile, Canada, Nigeria, the Philippines, Kenya, India, and the US cases of sexual violence against women in public spaces continue being reported during the crisis
- Different forms of online violence are on the rise including bullying, sexual harassment, and sex trolling

Increased calls to domestic violence helplines, police and shelters have been reported by some cities



- In Vancouver, reports of domestic violence to helplines have increased by 300% since the lockdown
- In New York, the number of visits to the city's domestic violence resource website, has nearly tripled - from about 45 visits per day to 115 between March 18 to April 5, 2020

Fear and experience of sexual violence impacts women's right to the city



Freedom of Movement



Livelihoods



Access to Services



LOCAL LEADERS RESPONDING TO COVID-19 CAN:



SECURE RESOURCES

for personal protective equipment (PPE) and advocate for local resources in stimulus plans to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the crisis including on violence against women, youth and children.

GET THE MESSAGE OUT

on COVID-19 and women's safety measures in place online and offline, in coordination with public health, police, schools, economic development, public transportation and other authorities and partners.

ENSURE SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN

and reassure victims/survivors including strengthening and expansion of shelters, helplines and counselling adapted to the crisis context.

ⁱ Gender based violence and unwanted sexual behavior in Canada, 2018. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/191205/dq191205b-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱ Know Fear Project Report (2018). Available at <https://www.idrc.ca/en/stories/know-fear-making-rural-public-spaces-safer-women-and-girls>

ⁱⁱⁱ UN Women (2018). Baseline Study: Cuenca Safe City and Safe Public Spaces with Women and Girls., p.8.

^{iv} European Union (2018). Cyber violence and hate speech online against women. Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL_STU\(2018\)604979_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL_STU(2018)604979_EN.pdf)

TRENDS AND ISSUES

Sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces is rooted in gender inequality and a human rights violation. It is a universal issue with great impact on victims/survivors, their families, and communities¹, and occurs on a continuum².

Women and girls experience and fear various types of sexual violence in public spaces ranging from unwanted sexual remarks and touching, to rape and gender-related killing. It happens on streets, buses and trains, near schools and hospitals, in parks, public toilets, and markets and water and food distribution sites in diverse settings (urban, rural, conflict, post conflict).

It reduces women and girls' ability to participate in work, at school, and in public life, and limits their access to essential services and enjoyment

of cultural and recreational opportunities. It is persistent and negatively impacts their health and well-being, with many other costs to communities³.

Women and girls living in poverty, including those from socially excluded and stigmatized groups (indigenous, migrants, those living with disability, displaced women and girls, etc.) are at greater risk of sexual violence, and more vulnerable to its negative effects, especially because of experiences of discrimination and inequality, and limited access to information, services, resources and justice.

Many women and girls do not report their experiences of sexual violence for fear of reprisal, lack of confidence in authorities, lack of legislation on sexual harassment in public spaces⁴, or its implementation, but also because of stigma or having further restrictions placed on their mobility.

The increased momentum gained through the #Metoo movement, #NiUnaMenos, and safe city free of violence against women and girls networks to break this vicious cycle require even more support, **as sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women during the pandemic continues to occur on streets, in parks, on transport, and online, with increased calls to domestic violence helplines, police and shelters in some cities⁵.**

Current measures to respond to COVID-19 such as social distancing and curfews have decreased the number of people on the street, resulting in a heightened risk of sexual violence and other forms of violence that women regularly experience when exercising outdoors⁶, working in public work settings⁷, living on the street⁸, traveling to and from home and work (for example those performing essential services, or those working in the informal sector).



Photo: UN Women/Johis Alarcón



Photo: UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Emerging data including from police, media and human rights organizations reveal that **sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces** continues to occur since the outbreak of COVID 19 in urban,⁹ rural¹⁰ and online settings. In Valparaiso, Chile, London, Canada¹¹, Nigeria¹², the Philippines, Kenya, India, and the US, government authorities and/or civil society partners have indicated cases of sexual violence against women in public spaces during the crisis, including some incidences where substance abuse is a facilitating factor¹³.

Several women workers have reported increased sexual harassment as the price they pay for choosing to walk or cycle to work in order to avoid public transport during the pandemic. Women doctors and nurses have also received verbal attacks while in transit in India¹⁴ and Mexico¹⁵.

Where women have access to technology, **online violence** is also increasing¹⁶. Before COVID-19, one in 10 women in the European Union reported having experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15 (including having received unwanted, offensive and sexually explicit emails or SMS

messages, or offensive, inappropriate advances on social networking sites)¹⁷.

Diverse media outlets and women's rights experts reveal that different forms of online violence are on the rise including stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, and sex trolling. Examples include unsolicited pornographic videos while women are dialing into a social event via a virtual chat room¹⁸ or unwelcome sexual remarks made in the chat box during online work meetings or online classrooms.

The office of the eSafety Commissioner in Australia reports that online abuse and bullying have increased in the past month by 50 per cent and that bullying of children has increased by 21 per cent via video chat platforms. According to Europol, online activity by those seeking child abuse material is increasing during the pandemic¹⁹.

Some reports indicate that calls to domestic violence helplines, police and shelters are increasing during the COVID-19 outbreak²⁰.



Photo: UN Women / Ploy Phutpheng

A Vancouver-based helpline for women experiencing domestic violence, received a 300 percent increase in calls in the past three weeks.²¹ There has been a surge in the number of visits made to New York City's domestic violence resource website, NYC Hope in recent weeks, as the city attempts to curb the spread of the coronavirus by enforcing strict stay-at-home measures. Website visits more than doubled -- going from about 45 visits per day to 115 visits per day from the period of March 18th, 2020 to April 5th, 2020.

In other cases, reporting or calls for assistance or services are decreasing, as women find themselves unable to leave the house, access help online or via telephone, or may be afraid of using shelters during this time.

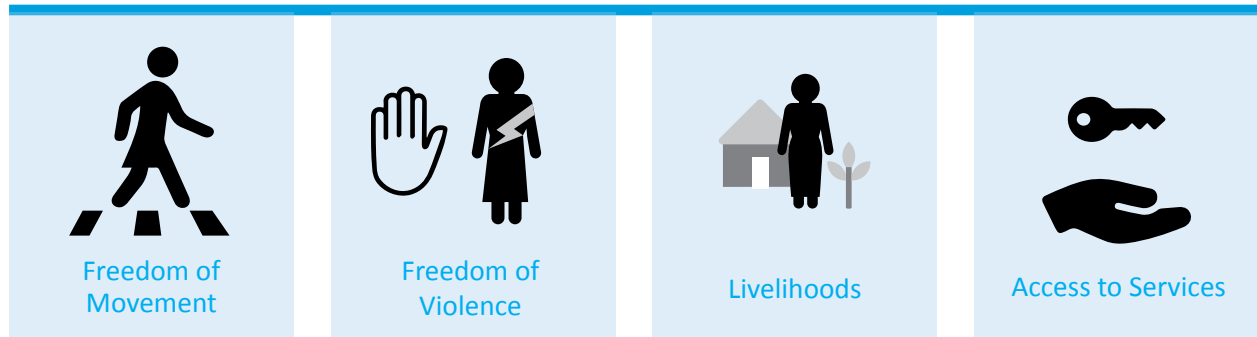
In Manitoba, Canada shelters/helplines have experienced a decline in calls for shelter. Calls to the provincial crisis line are also down since the lockdown. In Ecuador, the National Police and ECU 911 received 400 calls daily related to domestic violence at the beginning of March. Following the lockdown, these calls decreased

to an average of 235 calls per day at the national level.

While the risk of social disorder is low in some of the cities during the lockdown period, these may increase during the recovery period with increased risks of violence against women in public spaces. Evidence suggests that marginalized women are at higher risk of sexual violence and authoritarian abuse (i.e. those with disabilities, unstable housing, LGBTQI and migrants).²² During COVID-19, as economic and social conditions deteriorate, particularly in situations where social relationships are already strained by persisting income inequality²³ public disorder and militarization of public spaces may increase²⁴. This reality may increase the risk of sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in public spaces perpetrated by law enforcement agents²⁵.

The impact of violence on women and girls is severe in emergency settings, especially in contexts with poor functioning health systems, weak rule of law, high levels of violence against women and gender inequality.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN'S RIGHT TO THE CITY



Fear and experience of sexual violence and crime in public spaces is highly gendered and racialized impacting women's **freedom of movement**, and denying them the same opportunity and right to the city as men enjoy.²⁶ Many cities have implemented strict quarantine conditions, with restrictions in movement, and in some cases mobility limitations by sex²⁷. These measures may further shape women's perceptions of safety in public spaces and reduce their freedom of movement when restrictions are gradually lifted. Some cities, particularly in the United States, Canada, Germany and New Zealand²⁸ have seen an increase in the use of public spaces (i.e. neighborhood parks, streets, footpaths and bike lanes) while respecting social distancing measures in place which can help to foster women's appropriation of public spaces if their safety is ensured.

Before COVID-19, in many cities across the world women's perception of safety in public transport was much lower than men's perceptions. During the lockdown, public transport has also been severely reduced. There has been a decline in ridership as much as 80 to 90 per cent of some services²⁹ with lost revenue to cities, and a severe strain on budgets. With less bystanders in public transport and reduced last-mile connectivity, this reality may further affect **women's autonomous mobility and access to employment and essential services** during the lockdown. On the other hand, some cities like Bogota and New York have

experienced a surge in alternative safe, affordable, and autonomous transport options during the pandemic for women and men, including cycling.

As health care workers become overburdened and prioritize COVID-19 cases, urgent support e.g., clinical management of rape, mental health assessment and care, including psycho-social counselling for survivors of violence, may be disrupted. **Access to critical sexual and reproductive health services**, including for women who have experienced violence, will likely become more limited³⁰.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

The pandemic could also greatly affect **women's livelihoods, including in the informal sector**. The informal sector accounts for well over half of all urban employment, and largely dominated by women workers (i.e. women informal vendors, domestic workers, and women in tourism)³¹.

In this context, COVID-19 restrictions may have potential negative impacts on women participating in the informal economy including on their safety, livelihoods, and **food security**. For example, as street road traffic decreases and public markets continue to close, anecdotal evidence in Kampala, Uganda, El Alto, Bolivia and Quito, Ecuador suggest that women vendors are losing their produce and forced to sell their produce on empty and unsafe streets.

There is limited access to critical services, including **sanitation and safe housing** and an increase in unpaid care work across the globe during COVID-19. Stay-at-home orders and frequent hygiene practices are essential to cope with the health pandemic. However, in low- and middle-income countries, women are overrepresented in urban slums and they carry the burden of



Photo: © UN Women

water collection in 80 per cent of water deprived households³². For millions of women and girls, this reality increases the risk to sexual violence due to poor WASH access³³ and also makes social distancing next to impossible with cramped living conditions. COVID-19 restrictions implemented in deprived urban areas, will further affect time poverty and increase unpaid care work of women with children out-of-school, and the care provided for older persons³⁴.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES

Local governments can take action to respond to the public health crisis, and mitigate the social and economic impacts of COVID 19 on women and girls and communities in partnership with state/provincial and national governments, women's rights organizations, other civil society groups, UN Agencies, and the private sector, including through safe city free of violence against women and girls' policy and programme action.

DELIVERING SERVICES AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



- The City of Kigali, Rwanda has recently installed portable hand-washing stations in public spaces including at bus stops, taxi queues, car parks, and restaurants³⁵.
- The cities of Toronto, Canada, and San Francisco, United States are re-purposing public spaces (e.g. libraries, parks) to food banks to help those who are vulnerable during the pandemic.
- The city of Montreal, Canada is working to improve shelter services for the homeless, including new overflow shelters, and day centres providing assistance.
- In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY) in collaboration with UN Women are providing support to homeless women, youth and children including shelter, food and sanitary products during the emergency. In Hawassa City, safe city messages on prevention and response to domestic violence and sexual violence have been shared with religious authorities for community outreach.
- In Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, the National Capital District Commission (NCDC) and UN Women are providing soap, water, masks and other protective equipment to vendors, the majority of whom are women, as part of the Safe City Free of Violence against Women Initiative.
- The city of Valparaiso, Chile, as part of the Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Initiative is promoting bystander interventions around empty buildings to prevent violence against women in public spaces during COVID 19 in collaboration with the Mayor's office and UN Women.
- In Spain, a national law decree was endorsed to increase access to essential services during COVID-19 including shelters and emergency centers for survivors, and available rooms at hotels.

ENSURING WOMEN'S SAFETY AND WELLBEING

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_21879

