

## Safe Cities for women and girls, free from violence and fear

### Sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces

In cities all over the world, every day, women and girls face the threat of sexual harassment and violence in public spaces as they go about their daily routines—whether on city streets, on buses and trains, or in their own neighborhoods. These abuses limit women's freedom as equal citizens to enjoy the urban environment, and to exercise their rights to education, work, recreation, collective organization and participation in political life.

### Worldwide problem

Surveys give some idea of the extent of gender-based harassment and violence. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights found that 83 percent of women had experienced sexual harassment on the streets of Cairo, while 62 percent of men admitted harassing women. In New Delhi, India, a rape is reported every 29 minutes. In Lima, Peru, only 12 percent of women surveyed said that they could move around freely without fear of violence; in Montreal, Canada, the figure was just over 40 percent. In Tokyo, Japan, 64 percent of young women reported being groped when travelling by train.

While wealth does not shield women and girls from violence, those living in poverty or marginalized communities often face greater risks. They may have to walk to school or work after dark. Poor areas are also more insecure—less lit, less well maintained. Some women and girls face added dangers—migrants in xenophobic societies, the displaced, members of stigmatized groups such as those living with HIV, or young women who breach gender norms because of their work and studies, or their enjoyment of public recreational spaces traditionally reserved for men.

Despite disrupting the lives of countless millions of women and girls, this pattern of abuse is widely tolerated as a regular feature of city life. Violence against women in public spaces remains a largely neglected issue. Few laws or policies are in place to address it, in spite of its social and economic costs to individuals, families and communities.

All citations available at: [http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/)

*‘There is a “rape park” in almost every city. Women’s fear and vulnerability in public space are universal.’*

Veronica Wiman,  
Investigative Art Workshop  
“Fear and Gender in Public Space”, Curator, Sweden.

## UNIFEM – working for a safer urban future

In the context of global urbanization, UNIFEM will be spearheading various Safe Cities initiatives in the coming years to catalyze policy attention and innovative responses to address this emerging but universal issue. Inspired by its ongoing experiences through its *Programme in Latin America*, and building on its collaboration with pioneering women's networks and UN Habitat, UNIFEM will aim to generate know-how for local authorities and others to draw on in tackling this global phenomenon.

Focusing on impoverished areas and excluded groups, these efforts will work to empower women and their communities in diverse settings and circumstances. This includes women working from dawn to night in open markets under the constant onslaught of all types of abuse in the Pacific and Central Asia; migrant women and girls facing the daily threats of living in hostile xenophobic environments in Eastern Europe as elsewhere; women subject to extreme forms of sexual harassment and groping in public transportation, like in India; and low-income women living in crime-ridden areas at high risk of rape in their neighborhoods, in countries from Central America to Middle East and Africa.

A cornerstone of UNIFEM's efforts on this issue is its new flagship initiative, the *Global Programme on Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls, 2008-2014*. It aspires to develop a model for adaptation by local authorities and other decision-makers, in partnership with grassroots women's organizations and community groups. Its comprehensive approach encompasses good governance, urban planning and political participation. Its key strategies and components include:

- women's safety audits, to identify unsafe areas and needed interventions;
- surveys and data collection, to capture the magnitude of the safety risks and harassment that women and girls face every day in public spaces;
- introduction of practical safety measures by local authorities, in collaboration with women and their communities—such as changes in street lighting, signage, location of bus stops, access to emergency hotlines in metro and train stations;
- enhanced laws and policies to address these forms of violence explicitly and end impunity for abusers;
- prevention efforts, including mass media campaigns and community mobilization for zero tolerance for sexual harassment and lewd behaviour towards women—with a special focus on engaging young people and men of all ages;
- training and improved capacities of local authorities and other key actors to respond to violence against women and girls in public spaces, including the police, judiciary, social services and the media;
- and gender-responsive budgeting, to assess and track relevant public sector investments in making cities safer for women and girls.

The objective of the *Safe Cities* global programme is to deliver the first proven approach on how to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls in public spaces (through rigorous evaluation). This will provide a model that can be scaled up in many contexts—furthering women's empowerment and gender equality, while enhancing the quality of city life for all.

**Safe Cities for Women are Safer for All**