

Cairo Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Programme

The Issue

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. In Egypt, 13% of women aged 18-64 reported being exposed to any form of violence in public spaces during the 12 months preceding the survey¹; either at the workplace, in educational institutions, public transport or on the street. Younger women and girls are at increased risk; around one quarter of girls 18-19 years were subjected to harassment in public spaces. Other survey data² shows that 42.8% of female youth aged 13–29 experienced sexual harassment.

This universal problem causes psychological, emotional, physical and economic harm and distress for women and girls. It reduces their freedom of movement, ability to study, work, access essential services, participate in public life and enjoy recreational opportunities. In addition, violence against women hinders development goals and slows economic growth, especially through the challenges it creates for women in the workforce and the public sphere.

Our Strategy for Change

The Cairo Safe City and Safe Public Spaces programme was launched in 2011 and is one of the founding programmes of the **Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship initiative**. 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. In Cairo, the programme targets three low-income neighborhoods, namely: *Imbaba*, *Manshiet Nasser*, and *Elhagana*, and is implemented in partnership with the National Council for Women, Giza governorate, Cairo governorate, Care International in Egypt and three local civil society organizations.

A baseline study conducted in the three neighborhoods showed that in *Mansheyat Nasser*, 74% of never married female respondents said they felt unsafe walking on

main and side streets, and in public transportation stations because of fear of being sexually harassed. 82% of never-married women respondents in this neighborhood said they have experienced some form of sexual harassment in these public spaces. In *Imbaba* 68% of never-married women respondents and 62% of never married women respondents from In El Haganah said they experienced some form of sexual harassment in these public spaces.³

The expected impact in the Safe City Sites of Intervention include:

- A reduction in sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence (SDG 5.2, SDG 11.7)
- A reduction of fear and increased feelings of safety of women and girls
- Increased autonomous mobility of women and girls in accessing and using public spaces

Programme Achievements

1. Identify gender-responsive locally relevant and owned interventions

- Baseline study and women's safety audits conducted in the three intervention areas to identify the factors that make women feel safe and unsafe in the public domain. Based on the results, interventions were developed to increase women's sense of safety and use of public space through improving various elements of the built environment and changing community behaviors.
- Network of over 200 young volunteers formed and capacitated as agents of change in their respective communities.
- Coalition of 45 local NGOs formed and capacitated to deliver measures that protect women and girls from violence and/or reduce the risk of its occurrence.
- Support provided to national authorities on the conceptual approaches and implementing tools to create Safe Cities (e.g. the women safety audits).

2. Develop and effectively implement comprehensive laws and policies to prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces

- Amendment of the Egyptian Penal Code (article 306 bis (b) introduces the crime of 'harassment'

¹ The Economic Cost of Gender Based Violence Survey Egypt 2015

² Panel Survey of Young People in Egypt 2014

³ Baseline Survey of the Cairo Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Programme 2011

thus, facilitating more effective prosecution of sexual harassment incidents.

- The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women was adopted with the participation of twelve ministries. It encompasses four pillars on prevention, protection, response and awareness raising.
- Technical support and advice provided to advance women's legal rights, e.g. support to the adoption of a comprehensive law on Violence Against Women, and the amendment of discriminatory articles within the Family Law and Penal Code, to address and punish all forms of violence against women and girls, in line with international human rights standards.
- Support provided to distinguished members of the Public Prosecution to strengthen capacities on effective prosecution responses to violence against women and provision of support and protection of survivors.
- Support provided to the Women's Complaints office of the National Council for Women to strengthen capacities to receive and resolve complaints of women related to discriminatory practices and violence against women, through the provision of free-of-charge legal advice and legal assistance and referral to service providers, for thousands of women across the country.

3. Investments in the safety and economic viability of public spaces

- Support provided to national stakeholders to adopt gender responsive inclusive and sustainable policies and practices in urban planning and public transport.
- Support provided to improved women's autonomous mobility and accessibility through the gender-sensitive design of the Cairo Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project. This included conducting multiple surveys to capture women's travel patterns and preferences and to help inform the design of women's footpaths to and from stations. The BRT aims at providing a high quality public transportation system that is accessible to all.
- A safe, inclusive and economically viable market; *the Zenin* marketplace in *Boulaq El-Dakrou*, is upgraded (ongoing) based on a gender-sensitive design and gender action plan, to improve women vendors livelihoods. The market currently accommodates over 170 informal self-employed vendors; around half of which are women. Most of these women are poor and depend on the selling of fruits, vegetables, and basic merchandise for daily subsistence. They have no access to child care facilities and have experienced multiple and intersecting forms of violence in public and private spaces.
- An inclusive, community-owned space developed in *Ezbet El-Hagganah* making it safer for women

and girls by fostering community engagement, participation and trust.

- Support provided to the gender-sensitive design and urban upgrade of a public space located near a girls' school in *Imbaba*, where incidents of sexual harassment against girls were reported. The public space was converted into a 'community-owned space' that aims to provide quality and cost-effective services to the local community with a focus on activities promoting the rights of women and girls. A playground, seating area, and new landscaping were made in addition to physical improvements to the adjacent space to improve the pedestrian side-walks and circulation pattern nearby thus, enabling people with disabilities and low mobility to access the space. A local committee was also selected to manage the 'women-friendly space', ensuring its maintenance and financial sustainability.

4. Change attitudes and behaviors to promote women' and girls' rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence

- A coordinated community response adopted in the intervention areas, engaging over 20,000 community members (e.g. law enforcement, National Council for Women branches, NGOs, community leaders, mothers, youth, faith-based organizations) and utilizing innovative context sensitive approaches (e.g. interactive community theater, shadow theater, graffiti art, door-to-door campaigns, etc.) to develop a common understanding of sexual harassment and violence against women in public spaces to change negative attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women and girls. For example, interventions with tuk-tuk (auto rickshaw) drivers contributed to changing their perceptions about gender equality and women's rights and fostered a public debate about the issue of sexual harassment in public spaces while improving the safety of women and girls utilizing this popular mode of public transport in low-income areas.
- Development of effective communication campaigns; the 'Speak Up' campaign, featured Public Service Announcements on television and radio that addressed various forms of violence against women by encouraging the public to adopt a zero-tolerance attitude towards violence against women and tackling the victim-blaming culture and the stigma of reporting. The campaign has reached millions of views and shares on social media. Additionally, a song tackling sexual harassment in public spaces and confronting the veil of silence that often permeates it was launched and garnered over 5 million views on various social media platforms: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmM6MgoiCSM>