Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Policy Brief

Technology as a tool to make cities safe and combat violence against women

United Nations
Beirut, 2019

_____

19-00090

CONTENTS

Similar to other countries worldwide, the Arab region is witnessing an unprecedented urbanization boom, including the establishment of new cities that must be carefully managed to meet the needs of growing urban populations and achieve socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability. Challenges include increasing urban poverty; overstretched infrastructure, especially in the water, sanitation, electricity and transportation sectors; declining environmental quality; and rising crime levels. Inequality and violence against women are also associated with challenges emanating from urbanization.

Violence against women is perpetrated in private and public spaces. Prevalent forms in cities at the global and regional levels are sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces, which restrict women's ability to participate equally in urban life and infringe on women's right to the city,[1] meaning their right to live free from violence and the fear of violence and free from rights violations that arise in spaces where they live and work. Combating such violence is imperative. General Assembly resolution 73/148, the first of its kind, calls for the intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. Through this resolution, the United Nations has recognized sexual harassment as an impediment to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and to the full realization of their human rights.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda also focus on urbanization and inclusive and safe societies. Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; and the New Urban Agenda pledges to address discrimination and ensure that women and girls are safe in private and public spaces.

Countries are employing various means to fulfil these internationally agreed development agendas, including sound policies, enforceable legislation,[2] reforms and enhanced services. Other initiatives have expanded to use technologies, specifically information and communications technologies (ICTs) to address some of the challenges raised above. The present policy brief examines international and regional solutions to addressing women's safety concerns in public spaces. It also reviews successful experiences in adopting laws to criminalize sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces, and how some countries are utilizing ICTs to innovatively raise awareness and advocate for safe public spaces, report unsafe public spaces and track safety. It concludes with recommendations to Governments and relevant stakeholders in the Arab region on ways to use ICTs to address violence against women in public spaces and ensure safer cities.

I. BACKGROUND

A. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Urbanization, sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces are addressed in several global development agendas. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the United Nations formulated in September 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda include a stand-alone goal (SDG 11) on inclusive urbanization and human settlements, with a specific focus on gender inclusion and the right of women and girls to safety in public spaces. Target 11.7 calls for universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities; and target 11.2 aims to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all while taking into consideration the special needs of those in vulnerable situations, including women. A direct link exists between

---

[1] Erika Fraser, Kalpana Viswanath and Laura Maclean, "Violence against women and girls, infrastructure and cities", Briefing Paper (Infrastructure and Cities for Economic Development, March 2017).

[2] United Nations Development Programme and others, *Gender Justice and the Law: Assessment of Laws Affecting Gender Equality in the Arab States Region* (Beirut, 2018).

SDGs 11 and 5 on gender equality, as the latter focuses on eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Similarly, the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) that was held in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016, considers safety in public spaces as a top development priority. It provides key principles for inclusive urbanization, with an emphasis on gender inclusion; and notes that women's participation is essential for building fair and equal cities that drive sustainable development. The New Urban Agenda commits to realizing the concept of cities for all (or the right to the city), and promotes a safe, healthy and violence-free urban life for all. It intersects with a set of internationally recognized rights, such as those set out in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to ensure that all inhabitants - women and girls included - enjoy safe and equal cities. Table 1 highlights intersections between the development agendas and human rights instruments that aim to make cities safe for all.

Table 1. Intersections between the SDGs, the New Urban Agenda and CEDAW

SDGs	New Urban Agenda	CEDAW
SDG 5 **Gender equality**	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls through capacity-building and age and gender-responsive planning, policies and programmes.	**Article 2.f**: To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women.
	Address multiple forms of discrimination faced by women and girls, including exclusion, inadequate participation, crime and violence.	**Article 10.a**: The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training.
	Promote equitable and affordable access to sustainable basic physical and social infrastructure for all, without discrimination.	**Article 15.1**: States parties shall accord to women equality with men before the law. **Article 16.1.h**: The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property.
SDG 11 **Sustainable cities and communities**	Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, including health, water and sanitation, public spaces, public transport, housing, education, and public information and communication through policies and programmes.	**Article 7**: Right of women to participate in the political and public sphere on an equal basis with men. **Article 13.c**: Equal rights of both men and women to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.
	Ensure participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.	

Since the turn of the century, overpopulation has become a major concern for sustainable development. In the twentieth century, about 12.5 per cent of the world's population lived in cities,[3] which has now increased to 52 per cent.[4] Statistical estimations indicate that by 2050 urban inhabitants are expected to constitute 86 per cent and 64 per cent of the world's population in developed and developing regions, respectively.[5] Consequently, urbanization has placed cities at the core of development agendas. The international debate on the challenges of rapid urbanization was initiated at the Fifth World Urban Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 22 to 26 March 2010. Finding ways to cope with the impact of rapid urbanization poses a major challenge to meeting global development objectives.[6]

The global urbanization trend is also affecting the Arab region, which has undergone a rapid change since 1970. Today, half of the Arab region is urban, compared with 45 per cent for Arab developing countries, with significant variations in urbanization levels between countries. While above 85 per cent of the populations of Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon and Qatar live in urban areas, only one third of the total population does in the Comoros, Somalia and Yemen.[7] The urban population in the Arab region is projected to more than double between 2010 and 2050. Estimates show that almost three-quarters of the Arab region will be urban by 2050.[8]

Cities are driving national and global economic development. Urban inhabitants potentially have greater access to jobs and services than people in remote rural areas. At the same time, rapid urban growth in the region has created major development challenges, including social inequality, weak economic prospects, the exclusion of disadvantaged population groups. Various threats and risks also clearly manifest themselves in cities. Key social challenges include rising levels of urban poverty, urban unemployment, high demand for adequate and affordable housing and services, and an increasing crime rate. Many countries are therefore under pressure to develop adequate policies to ensure equal access for all to the opportunities offered in cities. Such policies, based on principles of good governance and equality, promote human rights and equal rights to the city and ensure safe public spaces for all, including women and girls. Such efforts include addressing violence against women, given that failure to sustain a feeling of security and safety affects women's everyday lives, restricts their movement and freedom to exercise their rights as citizens of the city (freedom to move, study, work, and leisure), and undermines their enjoyment of basic human rights. In various Arab cities, women's sense of security in public spaces is limited. The Thomson Reuters Foundation reported that Cairo was the world's most dangerous megacity[9] for women as per the 2017 annual poll.[10] Moreover, Trip.com ranked Egypt and Morocco among the 10 most dangerous countries for solo female travellers in 2017.[11]

---

[3] Anthony Townsend, *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers and the Quest for a New Utopia* (New York, Norton and Company, 2013).

[4] ST/ESA/SER.A/322.

[5] Ibid.

[6] ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E/137.

[7] Barry Mirkin, "Population levels, trends and policies in the Arab region: challenges and opportunities", Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series (New York, United Nations Development Programme, August 2010).

[8] E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/2.

[9] A megacity is defined by the United Nations as a city that has a population of 10 million or more people.

[10] Thomson Reuters Foundation, "Annual Poll 2017". Available at http://poll2017.trust.org.

[11] Mariam Nabbout, "These 2 Arab countries are the most dangerous for women travelers", 2 August 2017. Available at https://stepfeed.com/these-2-arab-countries-are-among-the-most-dangerous-for-women-travelers-2270.

A public space is publicly owned land available for public use. Public spaces encompass a range of environments, including streets, sidewalks, squares, gardens, parks and conservation areas. Each public space has its own spatial, historic, environmental, social and economic features. Having enough public spaces is a precondition for cities to function efficiently and equitably. The Global Public Space Programme[12] affirms the role of public spaces as the connective matrix on which healthy and prosperous cities grow. It emphasizes the core requirements of a public space without which a city cannot function, namely inclusion, connectivity, safety and accessibility. Access to public spaces is a first step towards civic empowerment and access to institutional and political spaces. Well-designed and maintained public spaces can help to lower rates of crime and violence.[13] Bad urban design choices, such as poor street lighting and secluded underground walkways, can put women more at risk of violence. Public spaces are envisioned as spaces of liberation, collaboration and ideas; however, this does not equally apply to all. For many women, they are spaces of fear where they have to constantly look over their shoulder. Research shows that urban women are at greatest risk of being victims of violence,[14] which prevents them from participating in city life without fear and threat of violence.

Efforts have been made at the global and regional levels to collect data on the issue so as to highlight the seriousness of sexual harassment in public spaces. At the global level, Hollaback and Cornell University conducted a large-scale research survey in 2015.[15] Over 16,000 women and girls were interviewed, making it the most comprehensive analysis of violence faced by women and girls in cities, particularly in public spaces. The results indicated that over 81 per cent of women interviewed experienced some form of sexual violence and harassment in public spaces in their lifetime: over 50 per cent of the women in Europe and 75 per cent of the women in the United States of America faced their first incident of harassment before the age of 17. A 2012 poll conducted in London by the End Violence Against Women Coalition showed that 43 per cent of young women had experienced street harassment in one year.[16] In France, a 2013 study by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies found that, in one year, one in five women suffered from verbal harassment while walking on the street.[17] Moreover, according to the first systematic household survey on sexual violence in public spaces conducted in New Delhi between October and November 2012, 9 out of 10 female respondents reported experiencing at least one form of sexual violence in New Delhi's public spaces in their lifetime.[18] The results showed that the most common form of sexual violence were comments, sexual jokes, whistling and obscene gestures; and that being alone was perceived as a key factor in increasing the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence in public spaces. Over 95 per cent of the respondents reported feeling safe in public spaces if someone was with them.

---

[12] UN-Habitat, "Global Public Space Programme". Available at https://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/global-public-space-programme/.

[13] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, "Safer cities", Habitat III Issue Papers, No. 3 (New York, 2015).

[14] Cecilia Tacoli, "Urbanization, gender and urban poverty: paid work and unpaid carework in the city", Urbanization and Emerging Population Issues, Working Paper, No. 7 (London, International Institute for Environment and Development; New York, United Nations Population Fund, 2012).

[15] Hollaback and Cornell University, "Cornell International Survey on Street Harassment, 2015". Available at https://www.ihollaback.org/cornell-international-survey-on-street-harassment/.

[16] Stop Street Harassment, "Statistics – the prevalence of street harassment". Available at http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/statistics/statistics-academic-studies/.

[17] Ibid.

[18] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the International Center for Research on Women, *Safe Cities Free from Violence Against Women and Girls: Baseline Findings from the Safe City Delhi Programme* (Washington, D.C., 2013).

At the regional level, especially in Morocco, a 2009 national study by the High Commissioner of Planning found that 63 per cent of women had experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces.[19] This was reaffirmed in a field survey of 40 women with diversified profiles who lived in Rabat. The results of the survey showed that most interviewees were victims of harassment or sexual assault in public spaces.[20] In the same year, the Yemen Times conducted a survey on teasing and sexual harassment in Sana'a. The survey included 70 interviewees from Sana'a, of which 90 per cent said they had been sexually harassed in public spaces.[21] In 2016, the Tunisian Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women interviewed 3,000 randomly selected women aged 18 to 64. The results indicated that 54 per cent experienced psychological or physical violence at least once in public spaces between 2011 and 2015.[22] Their experiences included being followed by men, insulted or sexually harassed.

There is an indubitable need to combat sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces, as stated by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-seventh session. Several clauses in the Commission's Agreed Conclusions were dedicated to the safety of women and girls in public spaces and called on States to support the development and use of ICTs to achieve it.[23]

D. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES: LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Although many Arab States recognize the presence of sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces, only few have enacted laws to criminalize it. Tunisia was the first Arab State to criminalize acts of sexual harassment by law in 2004, but the definition of sexual harassment was limited in scope.[24] A new law (No. 2017-58) amended the Penal Code, modified the definition of sexual harassment to include all acts of harassment, and augmented the related penalty from one year in prison to two and the fine from 3,000 to 5,000 Tunisian dinars[25]. In 2016, a law came into effect in Algeria to punish sexual harassment, including penalties of two to six months in prison for perpetrators of sexual harassment, in addition to monetary fines as set out in the legislation. In Egypt, following the 2014 Tahrir Square sexual assaults, new penalties against sexual harassment were introduced to the bylaw and existing penalties against sexual assault were increased. As per the new law, those found guilty of harassment could face up to five years in prison and a fine up to 50,000 Egyptian pounds. In 2018, the Saudi Shura Council approved a new anti-harassment bylaw, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a fine of 300,000 Saudi riyals.[26] In 2019, a law criminalizing abuse against women in Morocco came into force, which clearly defines sexual harassment and imposes prison sentences of one to six months and fines ranging between $200 and $1,000 for perpetrators.

Other States are in the process of enacting sexual harassment laws. In Lebanon, two draft laws penalizing sexual harassment were submitted and approved by the Council of Ministers but have yet to be voted on in parliament. The Jordanian National Commission for Women has been working to ensure that harassment is

---

[19] Stop Street Harassment, "Statistics – the prevalence of street harassment".

[20] Safaa Monqid, "Violence against women in public spaces: the case of Morocco", *Égypte Monde Arabe*, No. 9 (December 2012), pp. 105-117.

[21] Stop Street Harassment, "Statistics – the prevalence of street harassment".

[22] Ibid.

[23] E/2013/27-E/CN.6/2013/11.

[24] H. Kearl, "Tunisia street harassment study", 11 June 2016. Available at http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/tag/tunisia.

[25] Tunisia, Loi Organique n° 2017-58 du 11 Août 2017, Relative à L'élimination de la Violence à L'égard des Femmes, Article No. 226, *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne* (15 August 2017).

[26] About Her, "Saudi Arabia's new anti-harassment law: what you need to know", 24 June 2018. Available at https://www.abouther.com/node/10826/people/features/saudi-arabias-new-anti-harassment-law-what-you-need-know.

clearly addressed in labour and educational laws as well as in the Penal Code, but no legal amendments have so far been presented to legislators.[27] Table 2 sets out sexual harassment laws in the Arab region.

A legal framework substantiated by policies and programmes is needed for a comprehensive approach to combatting sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces. Innovative solutions that expand the role of ICTs in implementing such policies and programmes have gained momentum in the past years. ICTs are explicitly stated as a means of implementation for SDG 5, which calls for combatting violence against women in public spaces. ICTs are also regarded as an implementation tool for the New Urban Agenda, which stresses the importance of safety for all in public spaces and of addressing the many other challenges that cities face. Good practices in the use of ICTs to address violence against women in public spaces are explored in the following sections.

Table 2. Overview of laws on sexual harassment in the Arab region

Country	Status	Details
Algeria	Yes	Article 333 (amended) of the Penal code criminalizes public immodest acts and article 341 (bis) criminalizes sexual harassment.
Bahrain	Partial	Although there is no sexual harassment offence in labour Law No. 36 of 2012, workplace assault or verbal or physical sexual harassment of government employees is penalized by the Civil Service Law. Articles 344 and 348 of the Penal Code criminalize acts of immorality and assault, and article 351 criminalizes, with penalties of imprisonment and a fine, any violation of a woman's modesty, by word or deed, on a public road or in a frequented location, or by phone.
Djibouti	Partial	Articles 430 and 431 of the Penal Code criminalize any sort of offensive language and public insult with penalties of imprisonment and a fine.
Egypt	Yes	Law No. 50 of 2014 amends article 306 bis (a) replacing it with a new paragraph that provides as follows: individuals who carry out sexual or obscene gestures in any manner, including by modern means of communication, will be punished with a term of imprisonment or a fine. An additional paragraph (b) was added to article 306 (bis), stating that if the deeds described in (a) are carried out with the intent of receiving sexual gratification, they are considered sexual harassment.
Iraq	Yes	Labour Law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace, whether it occurs during the search for employment, vocational training or under regular employment conditions. Article 400 of the Penal Code criminalizes, with penalties of imprisonment and a fine, indecent acts against males or females without their consent. Article 402 criminalizes, with penalties of imprisonment and a fine, violations of a woman's modesty, by word or deed or indecent advances targeting men or women.
Jordan	Partial	Article 305 of the Penal Code criminalizes forms of sexual harassment, with penalties of imprisonment and a fine, such as immodest acts targeting males or females aged under 18, or women aged above 18 who have not consented to those acts. Article 306 criminalizes indecent proposals and offensive language targeting persons aged under 18 or women of any age.
Lebanon	Partial	The Labour Code does not prohibit workplace sexual harassment. The Penal Code includes the punishment of some indecent acts to which the description of sexual harassment may apply, such as article 507 which criminalizes indecent acts forced upon victims through violence and threats, and article 519 which criminalizes abusing or touching a male or female minor aged between 15 and 18 without their consent.
Libya	Yes	Article 12.10 of the Labour Relations Law prohibits employees from performing or inciting acts of sexual harassment. Articles 420 (bis) of the Penal Code criminalizes indecent words, acts or gestures against women on a public road or in a frequented

---

[27] Elizabeth Whitman, "As Jordanian women leave the home, sexual harassment reaches unprecedented levels", 18 March 2014. Available at https://www.thenation.com/article/jordanian-women-leave-home-sexual-harassment-reaches-unprecedented-levels.

Country	Status	Details
		location, and incitement to immoral behaviour through gestures, words or deeds. Article 421 condemns indecent acts in public spaces.
Morocco	Yes	Article 503.1 of the Criminal Code criminalizes sexual harassment and any person using threat, means of coercion or any other means exploiting power provided by their position for purposes of a sexual nature, with penalties of imprisonment and a fine.
Oman	Partial	Although there is no specific sexual harassment offence, indecent acts or gestures against women and girls are criminalized by article 266 of the Penal Code.
State of Palestine	Partial	Sexual harassment is not criminalized by the Labour Code. Article 305 of the Penal Code criminalizes unwanted sexual conduct targeting a male or female aged under 15 or a girl or woman aged above 15.
Qatar	Yes	Deliberately offensive remarks, sounds, or gestures against women and girls are criminalized by article 291 of the Penal Code, with penalties of imprisonment and/or a fine.
Saudi Arabia	Yes	Sexual harassment was criminalized in 2018. The bylaw defines harassment as any word, act or sign with a sexual connotation by a person targeting any other person that harms their body or modesty by any means, including through modern technology.
Somalia	Yes	Article 24 of the Provisional 2012 Constitution prohibits sexual abuse in the workplace, and the Puntland Sexual Offences Act was adopted in 2016.
Sudan	Yes	Article 151 of the Criminal Act was amended in 2015 to criminalize indecent acts and harassment.
Syrian Arab Republic	Partial	There is no specific sexual harassment offence in the Labour Law. However, article 505 of the Penal Code criminalizes, with a penalty of imprisonment, indecent touching or fondling targeting a male or female aged under 15, or a girl or woman aged above 15 without their consent.
Tunisia	Yes	Article 226 (ter) of the Criminal Code prohibits sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as a repetition of acts, words or signs that harm the dignity or modesty of their targets in order to induce a positive response on their part to the sexual desires of the perpetrator or a third party, or that would exert pressure on the targeted persons to weaken their will to resist those desires.
Yemen	Partial	There is no specific offence of sexual harassment. Some types of harassment may fall under the crimes of committing disgraceful acts against women and girls, which are punishable under articles 273 and 275 of the Criminal and Penal Code.

Source: Compiled by the Economic and social commission for Western Asia and others (ESCWA) based on State laws, and information from: United Nations Development Programme and others, *Gender Justice and the Law: Assessment of Laws Affecting Gender Equality in the Arab States Region*.

Notes: 'Yes': Sexual harassment is defined in legislation and is prohibited by the Penal Code or Labour Code; 'Partial': Sexual harassment is not defined in legislation, but offences in criminal or labour laws provide some protections.

II. INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES

In 2018, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women analysed online violence and violence facilitated by ICTs against women and girls from a human rights perspective, and noted that technology-related violence against women was aggravated through ICTs, such as mobile phones, the Internet, social media platforms and email. Nonetheless, recognizing the role of ICTs in innovatively advancing gender equality has also been strongly reiterated in international literature. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, ICTs have been recognized as critical for achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. In 2003, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) reconfirmed that ICTs would provide opportunities for women's full and equal participation in all spheres of society. This was reiterated at WSIS in 2005 and at WSIS+10. At the level of the Commission on the Status of Women, the role of ICTs was clearly stated at its fifty-fifth and fifty-seventh sessions. Today, the role of ICTs in fostering

gender equality is considered globally as one of the three means of implementation for SDG 5 on gender equality, which includes two targets focused on combatting violence against women, including sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces.

There is ample evidence on how ICTs can and are playing a core role in increasing the sense of safety and security for women and girls in public spaces. However, related global and regional good practices are still in their preliminary stages. ICTs are used to raise awareness on harassment in public spaces, map safe areas, advocate for safe services, report unsafe areas, and track women and girls when needed. The type of ICTs used varies between good practices, and can include online platforms, mobile applications downloaded on smartphones and wearable technologies.

A. ICTs FOR RAISING AWARENESS ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES

Raising awareness on harassment in public spaces is of crucial importance. In Canada, the Campus Safety Watch[28] smartphone application is designed to raise awareness on the personal safety services offered on all university campuses, to assist in improving students' personal safety, and to encourage community involvement in public safety for both men and women. This initiative includes awareness campaigns such as 'Women's Safety' and 'Silence Isn't Consent'. Similarly, in Tunisia, SafeNes[29] is a mobile application that increases awareness and connects victims with specialized non-governmental organizations. It allows users to report sexual harassment, and to designate a trusted person to track their movements in places where they do not feel safe. SafeNes also provides self-defence videos and safe-zone maps, and informs users about legal procedures for reporting sexual harassment. In Egypt, StreetPal[30] is an application that aims to provide girls and women with much-needed information on the crime of sexual harassment and empower them to take a stand against it, and offer options for survivors.

B. ICTs FOR ADVOCATING SAFE PUBLIC SPACES

Various initiatives aimed at mapping safe areas and ensuring that such maps promote safe services exist at the international and regional levels. One example is the Global Flagship Programme Initiative of UN-Women entitled Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces, which builds on the Global Programme entitled Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls Global Programme launched in 2011. The Initiative is supported by leading women's organizations, United Nations agencies, and more than 70 global and local partners. It aims to develop, implement and evaluate tools, policies and comprehensive approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in different settings. It began with founding programmes in Quito, Cairo, New Delhi, Port Moresby and Kigali, and included 35 cities by the end of 2018.[31] Programme implementation at the national level is achieved through partnerships with Governments, mayors' offices, women's groups and other community partners. Each city that participates in this programme adapts the global framework to local and country contexts. The common aim framing all work under the Initiative is to ensure that all 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 line with the programme, trained women and adolescent girls in Brazil use their smartphones to map safety risks, such as faulty infrastructure or services, obscured walking routes and lack of lighting. This has enabled communities in Rio de Janeiro to identify safety risks in 10 of the city's high-risk slums, and the findings were presented to local authorities to develop solutions. In Port Moresby,

---

[28] Centennial College, "Campus safety watch". Available at www.centennialcollege.ca/about-centennial/safety-and-security/campus-safety-watch/for-your-safety/.

[29] Women You Should Know, "Tunisian youth activist working to make women and girls feel safe in public spaces", 20 February 2018. Available at https://womenyoushouldknow.net/tunisian-activist-women-girls-feel-safe/.

[30] https://streetpal.org/about.html.

[31] UN-Women, *Towards an End to sexual Harassment: The Urgency and Nature of Change in the ERA of #METOO* (New York, 2018).

local authorities, the police and women's organizations worked together to improve infrastructure, raise public awareness on sexual violence and train police officers; and introduced a new public bus service catering exclusively to women and children, with uniformed bus crews to ensure safety on journeys to and from work.

Other examples of using ICTs to combat sexual violence and harassment of women in cities include initiatives such as panic buttons,[32] Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking, and closed-circuit television (CCTV). Using the right technology is essential for providing an adequate solution to combat sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces. However, as stated earlier, for a solution to be comprehensive, it must be supported by a legal framework, as shown in the box below.

Rotterdam, the first city to implement a comprehensive approach to combatting sexual harassment in the streets with the support of ICTs

To combat the high rate of sexual violence and harassment of women on the streets of Rotterdam, the city's municipality made sexual harassment of women on the street a punishable offence. The city's local regulations were amended to ensure that anyone who cat calls, follows or bothers a woman in any way could face a fine of between 190 euros and 4,100 euros or up to three months in prison, beginning in 2018.

In July 2017, Rotterdam started issuing warnings for sexual harassment on the street and additional officers were appointed to enforce the new regulations. The city also established a hotline for victims. By the end of 2017, Rotterdam launched a mobile app called STOPapp (https://stoppikpraat.nl/app/) that allows victims of sexual harassment to report incidents instantly and anonymously. By doing so, Rotterdam became the first city in Europe to provide a comprehensive approach to combatting sexual harassment in the streets by making the sexual harassment app available to all its residents and visitors, and punishing harassers with fines and/or prison sentences.

The app is primarily aimed at cases where the immediate involvement of the police is not considered necessary by the person reporting the harassment, though it can link to the emergency number if the confrontation escalates. The mobile app allows those making complaints to give their locations, describe the nature of the harassment, and add any information they feel appropriate, while remaining anonymous.

In this case, the importance of ICTs lies in the reported information, which allows the city council to draw up a map showing where women are having problems, the locations where repeated problems are occurring, and whether several different women are being targeted in similar ways. The data assist the municipality in directing its efforts in the best way possible to achieve a city that is free of sexual violence and harassment of women in the streets.

_____

Sources: Peter Cluskey, "Rotterdam launches app to combat sexual harassment", 19 December 2017, available at www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/rotterdam-launches-app-to-combat-sexual-harassment-1.3332913; and Janene Pieters, "Sexually harassing women, cat-calling to draw heavy fine, jail time in Rotterdam", 8 June 2017, available at https://nltimes.nl/2017/06/08/sexually-harassing-women-cat-calling-draw-heavy-fine-jail-time-rotterdam.

C. ICTs FOR REPORTING UNSAFE PUBLIC SPACES

ICTs also facilitate reporting unsafe public spaces and mapping harassment hotspots. One example from London is Safe and the City,[33] which is a website that provides users with a real time map of London, detailing areas where women or men have experienced harassment. It has a detailed key for assault, catcalling, commenting, groping, indecent exposure, stalking and taking pictures, among other acts of harassment. Application users can anonymously report harassment; the map is then updated for other people to see. The main aim is to make people feel safe by crowdsourcing user and crime data, thereby contributing to shaping

---

[32] A Panic Button is a button on an electronic device or a mobile phone aimed at assisting people in emergency situations by alerting someone they know or the police, depending on the device.

[33] www.safeandthecity.com/.

safe streets, communities and cities. Moreover, Hollaback[34] is a global movement to end street harassment around the world through ICTs.

In Brazil, *Não Me Calo*,[35] which means "I will not shut up", is an anti-harassment application allowing users to review restaurants based on how they treat women. In Egypt, where a high percentage of women have been exposed to sexual harassment, a real time violence mapping tool called HarassMap[36] receives reports of sexual harassment through SMS messages, and uploads them in real time to a map that shows where sexual harassment is happening in Cairo. In Morocco, *Finemchi*[37] which means "Where should I go?", is addressing sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces by proposing places that are safe for women. Through this application, places are reviewed and rated depending on how female friendly they are in a bid to reclaim public places. The application aims to increase women's safety in shared spaces, and to encourage businesses and establishments to accommodate women. Such practices help women to stay away from public spaces where harassment is happening, and to take informed decisions related to their movements. It also encourages owners of restaurants and other public places to better accommodate women, and urges government officials to monitor harassment hotspots.

D. ICTs FOR SAFETY TRACKING IN PUBLIC SPACES

In general, women feel safe in public spaces if someone accompanies them. The above-mentioned New Delhi survey affirmed that 95 per cent of interviewed women reported feeling safe in public spaces if someone was with them. The below-mentioned good practices of tracking women's movements provide a virtual sense of companionship. They also provide a helping hand in risky situations.

The SafetiPin[38] application allows users to alert someone when they are feeling unsafe, sending a location pin to a friend or family member's phone so that they can track users on a map until they reach their destination. The application also includes an emergency alarm that can be activated if assistance is needed. It also crowd-sources information on the safety of an area, using a feature that allows users to rate parts of a city based on factors like lighting and visibility, which simplifies the selection of a safe route to follow, especially at night. Designed with personal safety in mind, Safetipin incorporates many essential features, including GPS tracking, emergency contact numbers and directions to safe locations. The Smart24x7[39] application is supported by police to ensure the safety of women and senior citizens. The application sends panic alerts to emergency contacts in a problematic situation, and records voices and takes photographs in a panic situation and transfers them to the police. The bSafe[40] application follows users' movements through a live GPS trail. Users can also set a timed alarm on their emergency contacts' phone, which is activated if they do not check in at their destination. When the SOS is activated, the app makes a fake call to users and notifies emergency contacts with their location and video. In the Arab region, Securella[41] is a mobile application developed in Morocco. It allows women to trigger an alarm when they feel at risk. It connects women in danger with agents for immediate intervention, and offers users different 'triggers': tapping once when they feel unsafe in an area, and three times when they are in danger and need an agent to intervene.

---

[34] www.ihollaback.org.

[35] Julie Zeilinger, "Meet the group of young female coders who developed a yelp-like safety App", 22 April 2015. Available at https://mic.com/articles/116204/how-a-group-of-young-female-coders-developed-a-yelp-like-safety-app#.CwEwTyCav.

[36] https://harassmap.org/en/.

[37] https://finemchi.com/about/.

[38] http://safetipin.com/.

[39] www.smart24x7.com.

[40] https://getbsafe.com/.

[41] Christina Richter, "Securella – when security meets Cinderella", n.d. Available at www.vodafone-institut.de/f-lane/securella-security-meets-cinderella/.

The role of wearable technologies in tracking women and girls in public spaces is notable, as shown through various good practices. In the United States, the Geko whistle[42] is a safety wearable that sends out an emergency sound when the person wearing it is in danger. Self-described as the world's first smart whistle, it is powered by GPS tracking and Bluetooth technology to instantly alert friends or family in times of trouble. However, it is not as discreet as other wearables since the person wearing it must blow the whistle. The wearable device texts, emails and calls friends or family members with a map of the location of the individual wearing it. It follows the wearer minute-by-minute until the alert is deactivated by the person wearing it. Another example is InvisaWear,[43] which creates smart jewellery that can be worn around the neck and is embedded with a double-click function that sends an emergency message to selected persons and police while sharing the wearer's GPS location. The gold or silver-plated charms have a cell battery and circuit board that can be activated with pressure detection. It saves five emergency contacts and connects with the wearer's smartphone via Bluetooth.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recent wave of stories from women using the #MeToo hashtag and its many iterations have shown that, irrespective of country and culture, sexual violence and harassment of women is a global phenomenon.[44] It is a severe problem that requires a comprehensive response through legislation and policies and by capitalizing on innovative approaches, including ICTs.

Urban safety is fundamentally linked to the notion of the right to the city and encompasses the rights of people to mobility and access to the social, economic, political and cultural opportunities that cities offer. Women in every city worldwide, in both developing and developed countries, face sexual violence and harassment in public spaces. Only selected cities are open enough to hold themselves accountable and undertake actions to comprehensively address the issue, particularly through the innovative use of ICTs. Such technologies not only make women and girls feel safe and secure, but also enable them to share their experiences, reach out for help and support and discuss ways to battle abuse and harassment in their everyday lives. While a mobile application or a safety wearable may not free women and girls from violence and harassment, ICTs can help enhance their sense of safety and security.

This Policy Brief provided an overview of how the international community frames and addresses sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces. It also presented good practices at the international and regional levels. Policymakers in the Arab region are invited to consider the following recommendations to combat violence against women and address sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces to make cities safe for all:

- Adopt a comprehensive approach to combatting sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces based on a legislative framework, including enacting laws to criminalize sexual violence and harassment of women to foster a violence-free public space;

- Adopt a gender-sensitive approach to urban planning, which allows women and girls, men and boys to fully enjoy their right to public spaces free of violence;

- Explore and expand on ICT-based innovative solutions to address sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces, and foster collaboration between the ICT industry, international organizations, the Government and civil society to build the necessary infrastructure for ICTs;

- Capitalize on civil society's efforts to increase ICT literacy rates among women, and to combat sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces.

---

[42] www.mygekogear.com.

[43] www.invisawear.com.

[44] Meera Senthilingam, "Sexual harassment: How it stands around the globe", CNN, 29 November 2017. Available at https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/25/health/sexual-harassment-violence-abuse-global-levels/index.html.