

Local Action, Global Impact: Achieving SDGs through Safe Cities for Women and Girls

HLPF Side Event

Organized by:

UN Women, co-sponsored by the Government of Spain, the European Union, and the Government of Canada

Date: 16 July 2026

Time: 13:15 – 14:30

Format: In-person

Location: UN Secretariat, Conference Room 2

Languages: the event will be held in English, with simultaneous translation French and Spanish

1. Context

The 2026 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is convened under the theme “*Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for a sustainable future for all*”. The HLPF high-level side event on “Local Action, Global Impact: Achieving SDGs through Safe Cities for Women and Girls” will take place within the **15th Anniversary commemoration year of the Global Initiative in UN Women**.

Since 2011, UN Women’s Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces (SC SPS) Global Initiative has worked to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls (VAWG) in public spaces. Over 15 years, the programme has grown from 5 founding city programmes in the Global South¹, to 75 cities in 36 countries, including some cities in the Global North.

The event will showcase **multi-level results achieved through catalytic, integrated, and coordinated action** by local and national governments, women’s rights and civil society organizations, the private sector, and UN agencies. It will highlight lessons learned and explore ways to further accelerate local action to deliver on multiple SDGs ahead of the 2030 deadline.

Drawing on discussions, a global repository of knowledge products from the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative, and recommendations from leaders and experts, the event will contribute to informing the mid-term review of the New Urban Agenda (2016–2036), taking place immediately after the HLPF (16–17 July), as well as preparations for the 71st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2027. The session will focus on accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including through strengthened gender-responsive data, policies, and institutions.

¹ Cairo, Port Moresby, Kigali, Quito and Delhi.

Since its inception, UN Women has contributed to the strengthening and development of legislation and policies on the prevention and response to sexual harassment in public spaces in 25 countries (e.g. Egypt, India, Morocco, Philippines, Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, Colombia, Bolivia) through the SC SPS Global Initiative. Through its efforts to achieve the safety and economic viability of public space, investments in urban planning and infrastructure which take account of the needs of its population (e.g., lighting, transport, safe markets, gender-responsive design) have changed how public spaces are used and perceived, and have increased women's autonomous mobility (e.g., Cairo and Port Moresby). The SC SPS Global Initiative has demonstrated how prevention of violence against women can be embedded within non-traditional/often male dominated sectors (e.g., Transportation, Ministry of Planning, Commodity Sectors - Tea, Spices, Cotton, Textiles) as part of its work to transform social norms, including at the institutional level. At the core of its work across all participating cities in the SC SPS Global Initiative is coordinated and multisectoral collaboration that includes the active participation of diverse local women and sectors. This ensures that solutions are not isolated or temporary but embedded in systems and institutions that shape women's daily lives.

This high level side event will include partners/speakers from different sectors and will bring together national and sub-national government representatives, mayors, city leaders, women's rights partners, civil society, youth, UN agencies, and development partners to discuss how the prevention and response to sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and ensuring safe public spaces for women and girls are foundational to achieving the 2030 Agenda. The event will highlight innovative practices, share key results, reflect emerging challenges in a polycrisis context, and call for the continued need for integrated, multisectoral approaches to ensure safe public spaces for all.

2. Objectives of the event

Key objectives:

- Ensure that gender equality, the rights and empowerment of women and girls and their safety are firmly placed at the center of the HLPF discussions, an essential to achieving the SDGs.
- Showcase UN Women's leadership and contributions at global, national, and sub-national levels, including by highlighting how multilevel results are achieved as part of the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative and have contributed - and continue to contribute - to multiple SDGs including SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 7 (energy), SDG 8 (decent work), SDG 9 (infrastructure and industry), SDG 11 (cities and communities) and 17 (partnerships).
- Increase knowledge about how different stakeholders are working together to address women's and girls' safety in public spaces in different cities as part of integrated approaches that are also contributing to achieving other results (e.g., decent work, gender responsive infrastructure, women's economic participation, women's participation in public life).
- Promote effective localization of the 2030 Agenda through evidence-informed local action on gender equality, women's safety, women's empowerment, and women's participation.

- Inform reflections in the lead up to the 71th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women with its priority theme “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” that will critically assess gender equality across all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by establishing clear linkages with the overall trajectory on accelerating their implementation and by highlighting local progress and persistent gaps, particularly with the SDGs under in depth review for this HLPF.

3. Expected outcomes

- Increased awareness of UN Women’s contributions to applying a gender responsive approach to the achievement of multiple SDGs, including through its Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative.
- Strengthened knowledge on multistakeholder approaches to address women and girls’ safety in public spaces through integrated and cross-thematic approaches, with demonstrated results.
- Increased knowledge about subnational efforts to achieve the SDGs, including the roles local women play as agents of change.
- Strengthened policy coherence and increased political momentum between the 2026 HLPF, and the seventy-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW71) with its priority theme on “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing structural barriers and leveraging the interlinkages with the Sustainable Development Goals,”, as well as with the Experts Group Meeting on CSW71.

4. Participants

The event is intended for representatives of national and sub-national governments, women’s rights partners, civil society, and other UN entities.

Target Audience:

- Ministers for International Cooperation, Directors or other heads of delegations from capital
- Representatives of NYC-based Permanent Missions
- Local/state and national governments
- UN agencies
- Local 2030 network
- Women’s Organizations, Non-governmental organizations, Civil Society Organizations, and Community Based Organizations
- UN Women programme networks (e.g., Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces, Essential services, ACT, etc.)
- Leaders and commitment makers of the Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence
- Academia
- Private sector representatives

5. Overview of the Run of Show

OPENING SEGMENT (18 minutes)
Opening of the session by Moderator Claudia Fuentes Julio, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Welcoming remarks by Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Deputy Executive Director for Normative Support, UN System Coordination and Programme Results, UN Women
Welcoming remarks by the Ms. Sonia Hernández Partal, Deputy Director-General for Urban Policies, Ministry of Housing and Urban Agenda, Government of Spain, the evolution of support and partnerships on safe cities, <i>SC SPS Global Initiative as an illustrator of Spain's Feminist Cooperation Strategy in action</i>
Welcoming remarks by Renaud Savignat, ECOSOC Ambassador of the EU Delegation
SHORT VIDEO (4 minutes) - speakers transition
INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION (51 minutes)
Moderator: Claudia Fuentes Julio, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Panelists: Dr. Manal Awad, Minister of Local Development, Egypt – Cairo is a founding programme in the SC SPS, and who will discuss <i>the roles of national governments in supporting local efforts to address women's safety in public space</i> Irma Eneida Hernandez Berrio, Mayor, San Miguelito, Panama Region, Panama – <i>who will deliver remarks highlighting role of local government, the importance of women's political participation, in leading efforts on safe public spaces for women</i> Violet Shivutse, Chair and Africa Regional Representative, Huairou Commission, and Founder-Director of women-led community-based organisation, Shibuye Community Health Workers (Shibuye), Kenya – <i>on the role of grassroots women leaders, and the importance of connecting different movements for sustainable change in women's lives</i> Eliana Quiroz Gutiérrez, Director, Internet Bolivia Foundation, Bolivia – <i>who will provide insights on using an integrated, cross-thematic approach to women's safety across the online-offline continuum</i> Jane Magigita, Founder and Executive Director, Equality for Growth Tanzania - <i>Integrated approaches on the safety and viability of market spaces for women</i>
CLOSING REMARKS (3 minutes)
Closing remarks by Moderator

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