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**Advancement of women**

## **Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [71/170](#), provides information on measures taken by Member States and activities carried out within the United Nations system to address violence against women and girls, in particular sexual harassment as a form of violence against women. The report includes conclusions and specific recommendations for future action.

\* [A/73/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [71/170](#), the General Assembly recognized that violence against women and girls was an impediment to their enjoyment of all human rights and urged Member States to continue to adopt a more comprehensive approach to addressing it in both public and private spheres.

2. The present report is based on research and information available in the Global Database on Violence against Women,<sup>1</sup> and the Inventory on United Nations Activities to End Violence against Women,<sup>2</sup> both of which are administered by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), as well as information received from Member States and entities of the United Nations. Following the previous report of the Secretary-General on the issue ([A/71/219](#)), the present report covers the period from 18 June 2016 to 30 June 2018.

3. Given the recent unprecedented mobilization against sexual harassment and assault, in particular in the world of work, and the wave of women speaking out on the issue, as well as gaps in responses to effectively address those forms of violence, the present report places a special focus on the issue of sexual harassment. In line with the previous report, which highlighted domestic violence and violence against women in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, the focus of the present report is to effectively bridge existing knowledge gaps and cover emerging issues. The focused discussion in the present report is presented with analysis and information to address all forms of violence against women and girls. It highlights gender inequality as a root cause, State responsibility to prevent and respond, and efforts, including within the United Nations system, to address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. The Secretary-General has expressed his strong commitment to zero tolerance of such violence and to addressing its root causes through a series of concrete measures outlined herein.

## II. Global and regional normative developments

4. In the past two years, global norms on the elimination of violence against women and girls have been advanced by a number of United Nations bodies.

5. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Heads of State or Government and High Representatives called for the elimination of all forms of violence against women. In the New Urban Agenda, Member States committed to ensuring that public spaces and streets were free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and called for the design of safe transport in a gender-sensitive manner.

6. At its sixty-first session, the Commission on the Status of Women strongly condemned violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment, highlighting the negative impact on women's enjoyment of their rights in relation to work, and adopted a specific resolution on addressing sexual harassment in the workplace (see [E/2017/27-E/CN.6/2017/21](#)). That commitment was reiterated by the Commission at its sixty-second session, with particular attention given to women and girls living in rural areas, and with a focus on ending cyberbullying and cyberstalking (see [E/2018/27-E/CN.6/2018/20](#)). Sexual harassment has also been recently addressed in the context of violence against women in politics (see General Assembly

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en>.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://evaw-un-inventory.unwomen.org/en>.

resolution [72/278](#)) and in digital contexts (see Human Rights Council resolution 38/5).

7. Another recent development has been the adoption by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of its general recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 ([CEDAW/C/GC/35](#)), in which the Committee acknowledged that gender-based violence against women could occur in all spaces and spheres of human interaction, including public spaces, the workplace, areas dedicated to leisure and technology-mediated settings.

8. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences continued to examine related critical issues, including the role of technological advancements in changing the nature of violence against women and girls, and has called upon Governments to ensure that regulatory frameworks are aligned with human rights instruments (see [A/HRC/38/47](#)).

9. Another important normative development pertains to a new global standard on violence and harassment in the world of work. A relevant item has been placed on the agenda of the 108th session of the International Labour Conference, to be held in June 2019, with a view to adopting a convention on the issue, to be supplemented by a recommendation. Adherence to such a standard would expand obligations to address violence and harassment in the world of work, including sexual harassment and domestic violence.

### **III. Emerging issues in the elimination of violence against women and girls**

#### **A. Increasing global focus on sexual harassment and sexual violence: moving from attention to action**

10. A significant development in the last 18 months has been increasing global attention and mobilization around sexual harassment and sexual violence. The growth of the “#MeToo”, “#TimesUp”, “#BalanceTonPorc” “#NiUnaMenos” and “HollaBack!” movements, among other global and national solidarity movements, has resulted in an unprecedented number of women from different walks of life and regions of the world speaking out about violence against women and girls, in particular sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> Those movements, building on decades of advocacy by women’s movements around the world, have opened up new spaces, in particular through media and social media, for women’s voices and experiences to be heard. The unprecedented attention to systemic sexual harassment and sexual violence has the potential to culminate in a tipping point, whereby such violations would no longer be accepted as the norm and perpetrators would be held to account. To address it effectively, actions need to focus on addressing the unequal power relations between men and women that permeate all institutions. The United Nations, for example, has adopted measures to achieve gender parity, in addition to strengthening its policies with respect to sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse.

11. Sexual harassment is ubiquitous and experienced by women in a range of settings, including the workplace, educational institution and public spaces, both offline and online. Sexual harassment is meted out through technology, occurs on

<sup>3</sup> Purna Sen, “Women are uniting against sexual violence — and we won’t be stopped”, *The Guardian*, 6 July 2018. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jul/06/women-sexual-violence-harassment>.

streets and at social and cultural events, and takes place in and around workplaces, schools, public transportation, recreational spaces, marketplaces and water distribution sites. Despite limited global data, some studies have revealed the alarming scale and extent of the problem. A study of 42,000 people in the European Union found that every second woman (55 per cent) had experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, and one in five women (21 per cent) had experienced it in the 12 months preceding the survey. Among women who had experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, 32 per cent indicated that the perpetrator had been someone that they had come in contact with in the employment context, such as a colleague, a boss or a customer.<sup>4</sup>

12. Studies conducted at the national and local levels have also highlighted alarming rates of sexual harassment in a range of settings. An Australian survey of over 30,000 university students found that 32 per cent of female students had been sexually harassed at university, including while travelling to university, compared to 17 per cent of male students.<sup>5</sup>

13. International legal and policy frameworks reflect the recognition of sexual harassment as a form of discrimination against women and a violation of human rights, and a growing number of laws are addressing the phenomenon. However, sexual harassment has for too long been normalized, justified and made invisible as an inevitable part of life. Legal frameworks on sexual harassment still remain inadequate and uneven across countries, with particularly limited protection against sexual harassment in public spaces. Systems put in place to address sexual harassment have been insufficient to enable women to come forward and seek justice. Women do not report sexual harassment for various reasons, including for fear of reprisal or concerns that the issue will be dealt with ineffectively, ignored or covered up. That has resulted in a culture of victim-blaming and impunity for perpetrators.

14. The global movements that have called out sexual harassment and assault on a mass scale have set new expectations for accountability and action. In cases where organizations do not take decisive action, increasing mobilization will continue to demand change. There is now an opportunity for the stories shared by women to shift the focus from the believability of victims to the accountability of perpetrators and the action of duty bearers, including Governments and employers.

## **B. The continuum of violence against women and girls**

15. One of the most significant realizations emerging from the various solidarity movements is that, rather than limited to being a series of individual incidents perpetrated by outliers, violence against women and girls is systemic in nature, occurring across a range of settings and taking a multiplicity of forms. That realization has exposed unequal power relations between women and men as the root cause, which is reinforced by harmful masculinities that perpetuate male domination, the assumption of sexual entitlement and the expectation of women's subservience. Gender inequality is deeply embedded in the structures and institutions that organize and reinforce an unequal distribution of economic, social and political power and resources between women and men. Gender inequality is also reinforced by discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes that dictate the conduct, roles, interests and contributions expected from women and men in public and private life, and by the practices, behaviours and daily actions that reinforce men's power and

<sup>4</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Violence against Women: an EU-wide Survey — Main Results* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities* (Sydney, Australia, 2017).

normalize disrespect towards women. The fact that women are less likely to be represented in public decision-making roles sends a message about the value of women's voices and entrenches ideas regarding men's control and power over decisions and resources.

16. Violence experienced by women and girls takes multiple forms that may in fact reinforce each other and overlap. Available comparable data from 87 countries for the period 2000–2016 show that, worldwide, an average of 19 per cent of women and girls 15 to 49 years of age had experienced physical and/or sexual violence committed by an intimate partner in the past 12 months. Violence against women in its gravest forms can be lethal, with femicide being a global phenomenon.

17. Understanding violence against women and girls as a continuum recognizes the commonalities and connections between manifestations of violence in different contexts.<sup>6</sup> All forms of sexual violence against women and girls, including rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, are rooted in male domination, entitlement, power and control. They all involve coercion, force, intimidation and threats that deny a person's dignity.

18. Sexual harassment, as one form of violence against women, occurs within the context of inequality and is part of a continuum of violence. It is enabled by women's unequal economic status, economic insecurity and a lack of equal representation and participation, in particular in leadership positions, across different sectors. While men can be victims of sexual harassment and other forms of violence too, the vast majority of cases involve men perpetrating violence and harassment against women. Whether sexual harassment occurs at work, in school or in public spaces, all forms of violence and harassment are directly or indirectly used to maintain and reinforce patriarchal norms, roles and structures and an unequal power relationship between women and men. The concept of a continuum of violence draws the connection between the "horrific" and the "everyday" experiences of violence and abuse against women and girls. The concept is important for understanding sexual harassment, given that there is often a tendency to focus on the more extreme forms of violence and neglect or minimize the everyday experiences of abuse and harassment that can have a deeply corrosive and harmful effect on women's lives.<sup>7</sup>

19. For women and girls subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality, the experience of sexual harassment and sexual violence can be compounded by a broader context of exclusion and discrimination. For example, for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons, experiences of sexual harassment can be bound up in harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity, where women are not only harassed on the basis of their gender, but also for transgressing expected gender identities and roles. Some groups of women, for example migrant women, are often subjected to sexual harassment that is also fuelled by racist stereotypes about the sexual roles and subservience of particular groups.

20. Addressing sexual harassment requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes the continuum of violence against women and girls and the different settings in which it occurs, with comprehensive laws that are properly enforced, and preventative measures to shift gender social norms, expectations and behaviours, in particular in respect of harmful masculinities, assumed male sexual entitlement, control and dominance, and women's expected sexual subservience. In order to achieve change, it is vital to engage men and boys in efforts to address sexual harassment, including with respect to the equal sharing of responsibilities in different

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<sup>6</sup> Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Liz Kelly and Nicole Westmarland, "Naming and defining 'domestic violence': lessons from research with violent men", *Feminist Review*, vol. 112, No. 1 (February 2016).

areas, such as child-rearing and parenting, domestic work and caregiving. Evidence shows that men with more gender-equitable attitudes are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence.<sup>8</sup>

### C. Sexual harassment in the world of work

21. In the world of work, sexual harassment occurs in the private and public sectors, across all industries and in the formal and informal economies. The costs of sexual harassment and sexual violence in the world of work are high for the individuals affected, for the organizations in which sexual harassment or sexual violence occurs, and for the public and tax payers, through social costs and the costs of services to address the consequences. For individuals, sexual harassment has a detrimental impact on health and well-being, employment, future work prospects and economic opportunities.<sup>9</sup> There is limited global data on the specific impact of sexual harassment in the workplace. However, according to one survey by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, workers who had experienced physical violence were three times more likely to experience depression and twice as likely to report stress. After being bullied or harassed, workers were four times more likely to experience depression, three times more likely to report problems sleeping and twice as likely to report stress.<sup>10</sup> Speaking out on sexual harassment can also be costly for individuals, as it may result in job loss or reduced earnings, in particular for service workers who may depend on tips for their earnings.<sup>11</sup>

22. The costs of sexual harassment to organizations are also very high, including increased turnover and absenteeism, lower individual and group productivity, loss of managerial time to investigate complaints, and legal expenses, including litigation costs and the payment of damages to victims.<sup>12</sup> While there is very little up-to-date research on the subject, according to a survey of 160 corporations in the United States, a typical Fortune 500 company with 23,750 employees lost \$6.7 million a year because of absenteeism, low productivity and staff turnover as a result of sexual harassment.<sup>13</sup> Data from the joint the Better Work Programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) suggest that, where sexual harassment is more prevalent, average business profits are negatively impacted.<sup>14</sup>

23. Changing work cultures is critical to ending sexual harassment. Lessons from relevant initiatives to change work cultures (for example, with regard to workplace safety) point to the potential of a combination of measures, including regulation, to effectively prevent and respond to sexual harassment. A comprehensive approach addressing sexual harassment in the workplace requires: specific laws that set out the obligations and responsibilities of employers and their effective enforcement;

<sup>8</sup> Gary Barker and others, “Evolving men: initial results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey” (Washington, DC, International Centre for Research on Women; Rio de Janeiro, Instituto Promundo, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), “Background paper for discussion at the Meeting of Experts on Violence against Women and Men in the World of Work (3–6 October 2016)”.

<sup>10</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Physical and Psychological Violence at the Workplace* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> ILO, *Ending Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2017). Available at [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_553577.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_553577.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Joni Hersch, “Sexual harassment in the workplace” (Institute for the Study of Labour, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Robert H. Faley and others, “Estimating the organizational costs of sexual harassment: the case of the U.S. Army”, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, vol. 13, No. 4 (December 1999).

<sup>14</sup> ILO, *Ending Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work*.

unequivocal leadership and policies stating zero tolerance for sexual harassment and assault; enabling reporting mechanisms; timely and decisive action in response to sexual harassment; comprehensive support for victims; training and education; bystander intervention training; and broader gender equality measures. Indeed, a meta-analysis of the impact of sexual harassment on organizations showed that organizational tolerance is the single most important factor in whether sexual harassment occurs in a workplace.<sup>15</sup>

#### **D. Technology and violence against women and girls**

24. The magnitude and impact of technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, its impunity, lack of remedies and weak prevention measures are deeply concerning. Although global data are not available, a study of the European Union revealed that 1 in 10 women there had experienced cyberharassment since the age of 15, with the risk being highest among young women 18 to 29 years of age.

25. Rapid advances in technology, with their wide reach and accessibility, have provided another avenue through which sexual harassment and sexual assault are being perpetrated. The continuum of sexual harassment and sexual assault also extends both offline and online. While the forms of violence perpetrated through the use of information and communications technologies are not necessarily new, technological advances have transformed the nature and extent of and the harm caused by that violence. The transformation has been facilitated by the ever-faster pace at which information spreads, the ability to perpetrate harassment and violence from a distance, the increased connectivity between perpetrators online and the use of anonymous profiles.

26. Sexual harassment facilitated by technology takes many different forms and is defined as unwanted verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature online with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (see [A/HRC/38/47](#)). It may involve the non-consensual dissemination of sexualized images, the communication of sexual threats, or unwanted advances. Some specific forms of online harassment have emerged in recent years, including “trolling”, online stalking and online mobbing. Perpetrators of online sexual harassment can be either known, such as colleagues, neighbours, partners or ex-partners, or unknown.

27. Some groups of women are particularly vulnerable to technology-facilitated sexual harassment, such as journalists, women in politics, women human rights defenders, bloggers, young women and women belonging to particularly marginalized groups. Women in public life are often sexually harassed because of their public roles and advocacy for women’s human rights and gender equality. The intimidation and threats to which they are subjected are a form of violence against women and also are a form of backlash against women’s increasing public participation.

28. The harms caused by sexual harassment, abuse and violence facilitated by technology are severe, in particular the psychological harm due to their scale and repetitive nature. It may result in depression, anxiety and self-harm and may cause women to reduce their online presence or to censor themselves. Online sexual harassment can be an extension of offline sexual harassment, with economic, health and social consequences for women.

<sup>15</sup> Chelsea R. Willness, Piers Steel and Kibeom Lee, “A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment”, *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 60, No. 1 (February 2007).

29. Those same technological advances can, however, also provide new opportunities for movement building and for women's mobilization and action against sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women. Technology enables women to connect and speak out about their experiences, as evidenced by the recent movements focused on sexual harassment and sexual violence.

30. There is a need for stronger action from Member States to prevent and eliminate online violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. Doing so will require the exercise of due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence that are committed through the use of technology, and an increased focus on regulation and prevention efforts, to ensure that women enjoy the right to be free from sexual harassment and from all forms of violence, both offline and online.

#### **IV. Actions taken by Member States and the United Nations system to eliminate violence against women and girls, in particular sexual harassment**

31. The following sections provide an overview of recent developments and actions taken by Member States<sup>16</sup> and the United Nations to address violence against women, with a focus on sexual harassment, highlighting promising approaches, challenges and gaps. While the focus of the present report remains on sexual harassment, information is also provided on action taken to address violence against women and girls more broadly.

32. A comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and girls, supported by adequate financial resources, remains essential. The recently launched Spotlight Initiative of the United Nations and the European Union,<sup>17</sup> supported by an initial investment by the European Union of 500 million euros, galvanizes such a comprehensive approach and encompasses measures in the areas of laws and policies, prevention, services and data collection to address violence against women and girls and other harmful practices. The initiative aims to strengthen collaboration among different actors, including national Governments and civil society, and to demonstrate that interventions addressing gender inequality and violence against women, when adequately funded, effectively coordinated and in support of comprehensive programmes, can have an impact on the realization of all Sustainable Development Goals.

##### **A. Comprehensive laws and women's access to justice**

33. Over the past three decades, while countries have increasingly introduced laws to address violence against women and girls, significant gaps and inadequacies remain, leaving women unprotected from various forms of violence in many contexts. A key challenge is the poor enforcement of such laws, owing to limited political will,

<sup>16</sup> Submissions were received from the following Member States: Andorra, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Myanmar, New Zealand, Nigeria, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.un.org/en/spotlight-initiative/index.shtml>.

poor provision of and access to legal services, and persistent stigma around such violence, which often prevents women from seeking justice (see [E/CN.6/2015/3](#)).

34. A World Bank study of legislation on violence against women in 189 economies found that, between 2016 and 2018, 13 countries had reformed laws to strengthen protections in that area. For example, Ecuador and Tunisia introduced comprehensive laws to address multiple forms of violence against women across public and private settings. Other countries strengthened legislation on domestic violence by expanding the scope of protection (Kenya), or by extending it to cover various forms and defining it as a criminal offence (Mongolia). Latvia improved protection orders and the prosecution of perpetrators. Despite that progress, 45 economies remain without specific legislation on domestic violence. Some 72 countries do not have clear criminal penalties for domestic violence. In 12 countries, perpetrators of rape are exempt from charges if they marry the victim.

35. With regard to sexual harassment specifically, although there has been progress in enacting laws to address sexual harassment in the workplace, women still remain unprotected by law in other spheres such as education and public spaces. Of 189 countries, 35 do not have legislation on sexual harassment; 59 do not have legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace; 123 do not have legislation on sexual harassment in education; and 157 do not have legislation on sexual harassment in public spaces.<sup>18</sup> Those data suggest that the coverage of laws remains uneven and limited, with women and girls unprotected in many spheres of life, leaving them particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment.

36. Sexual harassment provisions are often found in criminal codes, anti-discrimination statutes, workplace health and safety laws, as well as labour legislation. While there is no internationally agreed definition, key elements of sexual harassment include the concepts of “unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature”, “the violation of dignity of a person”, and the effect of creating an “intimidating, hostile, humiliating, degrading or offensive environment”.<sup>19</sup> Good practices in laws addressing sexual harassment recognize sexual harassment as a form of discrimination and cover multiple spheres such as public spaces, education, employment, including formal and informal sectors, and in the provision of goods and services. Laws should reflect the recognition that sexual harassment can occur in the context of both vertical and horizontal power relationships and between workers, regardless of their contract type or status, and that perpetrators can be third parties or clients.<sup>20</sup>

37. Several countries have recently introduced or strengthened legislation to improve protection against sexual harassment. The improvements include the passage of new legislation specifically addressing sexual harassment (Barbados), the revision of criminal laws to include provisions on sexual harassment (Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany and Haiti) and the inclusion of provisions on sexual harassment within human rights, anti-discrimination or labour laws (Cambodia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Lithuania). Limited information was provided, however, on the implementation or enforcement of those laws. A good practice in the formulation of sexual harassment laws is to include an explicit requirement that employers and educational institutions take steps to prevent sexual harassment and to include provisions that stipulate the liability of employers in sexual

<sup>18</sup> World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018). Available at <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/999211524236982958/WBL-Key-Findings-Web-FINAL-2.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> ILO and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), “Handbook on promising practices in preventing and ending violence and harassment against women in the world of work” (forthcoming).

<sup>20</sup> UN-Women, “Handbook for legislation on violence against women” (2012).

harassment cases where they have not taken reasonable steps to prevent it (Canada and Lithuania). Other countries are considering draft legislation on sexual harassment (Eswatini, Indonesia, Jamaica, Lebanon, Mali and Saudi Arabia). Recognizing the need to expand protection against sexual harassment to digital settings, several countries have also enacted legislation to protect against sexual harassment and abuse online (Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Kenya, Republic of Korea and United Arab Emirates).

38. The gap in legal protection against sexual harassment in public spaces remains stark. There are, however, examples of good practices with respect to laws at the national and city levels, which have often been developed and/or implemented with the support of UN-Women.<sup>21</sup> For example a city law addressing sexual harassment in public spaces in Brussels was followed by the adoption a national law that penalizes sexual harassment in public spaces throughout Belgium.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, city-level laws have also recently been adopted in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador and Philippines.<sup>23</sup> A city law in Buenos Aires contains a particularly promising provision that requires the implementation of prevention measures such as educational campaigns.<sup>24</sup> Those efforts should be expanded across cities and countries to address the gaps in related legal protections.

39. Women experience significant barriers to reporting sexual harassment. Therefore, a critical component of any law addressing sexual harassment should be the provision of criminal, civil and administrative remedies, thereby giving victims options on how they wish to pursue a complaint and seek compensation.<sup>25</sup> There was very limited information provided by countries on the remedies available in sexual harassment complaint processes. A few countries reported on measures to increase women's access to justice through either improving court processes to support victims (Lithuania and Sierra Leone), improving complaint processes (Mexico), or the provision of legal support (Cambodia and Republic of Korea).

40. Many countries have independent equality bodies, ombudspersons or national human rights institutions that review complaints of sexual harassment. Some countries such as Denmark have established good practices that involve public engagement and inquiry, allowing for individuals to share their experiences of sexual harassment, with a view to strengthening responses, legislation and policy reform. The Australian Human Rights Commission recently announced a large-scale national inquiry into sexual harassment in the workplace.

41. Recognizing the impact of technology on violence against women, including sexual harassment, a few countries have also recently established specific roles to monitor cybercrimes and violence and abuse that take place online (Austria) or have introduced specific policies to address the issue (Denmark). Given the ubiquitous nature of sexual harassment and abuse online, more focus is needed on legal reform in this area.

42. Under the leadership of the Secretary-General,<sup>26</sup> the United Nations is addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment committed by staff and partner entities. The Secretary-General has introduced a four-pronged strategy to

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<sup>21</sup> UN-Women, "Safe cities and safe public spaces: global results report" (2017). Available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/safe-cities-and-safe-public-spaces-global-results-report>.

<sup>22</sup> UN-Women, "Guidance note: legislation on sexual harassment in public spaces" (forthcoming).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> See [www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2018-02-02/secretary-generals-remarks-press-stakeout](http://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2018-02-02/secretary-generals-remarks-press-stakeout).

prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse system-wide, which is focused on prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims, ending impunity, engaging with civil society and external partners, and improving strategic communication for education and transparency. Key initiatives include the appointment of the Victims' Rights Advocate and Field Victims' Rights Advocates; the development of protocols on the provision of assistance to victims; the establishment of accountability for credibly investigating all allegations; a tool for screening prior to recruitment; the creation of a circle of leadership on the issue composed of Heads of State or Government; and the establishment of a voluntary compact between the United Nations and Member States regarding measures to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

43. In operationalizing his zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment, the Secretary-General established a Chief Executives Board (CEB) task force on addressing sexual harassment, comprised of senior representatives across the system, to focus on prevention and response. The task force has reached agreement on a common definition of sexual harassment and on common policy principles. It is also seeking to improve reporting and victim support mechanisms across the United Nations system. In June 2018, a system-wide database was launched to prevent the hiring of individuals whose previous employment had been terminated on grounds of sexual harassment. The United Nations Secretariat has instituted fast track procedures for receiving, processing and addressing complaints and recruited specialized investigators. The Secretariat also established a 24/7 helpline. Complaints of sexual harassment are being handled as "category 1" matters to be investigated by specialized investigators in the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The whistleblower policy has been strengthened, as has the policy on investigations and disciplinary matters. A survey of United Nations personnel will be conducted to better understand prevalence and reporting patterns. In addition, the Secretary-General's system-wide strategy on gender parity has contributed to combating sexual harassment by addressing the unequal gender power relations that underpin and enable sexual harassment.

44. In addition to measures on sexual harassment, countries, often with the support of the United Nations system, have continued to adopt or strengthen laws to address different forms of violence against women and have revised policy frameworks such as national action plans. Some countries have reviewed legislation with a view to ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Liechtenstein, Romania and Switzerland). With respect to measures to address different forms of violence, particularly promising approaches include the coordination and alignment of national action plans on violence against women with plans at the subnational level (Argentina), legislative provisions for the prevention of violence against women (Ukraine) and the targeting of policies to address the needs of particularly marginalized groups such as indigenous women (Colombia and Honduras), adolescent girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals (El Salvador), and Afrodescent communities (Honduras), in line with the commitment set out in the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. Despite those examples, efforts to use legal and policy measures to reach women and girls who have been left behind remain limited.

## **B. Preventing violence against and harassment of women and girls**

45. Countries are increasingly recognizing the importance of investing in prevention by introducing measures such as awareness-raising campaigns, increasing the engagement of men, boys and community leaders, and community mobilization programmes (Argentina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Chile, Honduras, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Togo, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom of

Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Only a few countries reported efforts to prevent violence against women by addressing gender inequality as a root cause and by transforming gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms (Cambodia, Germany and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)). Recognizing the important role that the media plays in perpetuating gender stereotypes, which can normalize violence against women and girls, El Salvador has established an observatory for the media with a view to eliminating gender stereotypes and sexist advertising.

46. Very few countries have introduced properly resourced, long-term and coordinated prevention strategies, with the vast majority reporting only short-term activities. Only one country reported on a comprehensive prevention strategy grounded in an evidence-based approach (Cambodia), and only one country reported on efforts to reach marginalized groups (Mauritania). Promising practices include frameworks that promote a coordinated and multisectoral approach to tackling gender inequality as a root cause of violence, along with efforts to transform gender norms and to address the underlying factors operating at the various levels, including intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>27</sup>

47. The evidence on what works to prevent sexual harassment in different settings is limited but growing. Many of the strategies that are effective in preventing other forms of violence against women can also be extended to prevent sexual harassment. In the context of the workplace, strategies to prevent sexual harassment should be implemented in tandem with strategies to address the abuse of power, to realize women's rights in the world of work and to improve women's employment outcomes, in particular for women who engage in the most vulnerable forms of work.<sup>28</sup> That includes women's equal representation in leadership positions and decision-making bodies, equal pay and the equal sharing of paid work and care responsibilities. While strategies to address women's economic empowerment are nearly universal, very few have connected those efforts to the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.

48. Best practices for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace highlight the importance of a strong commitment from leadership; the articulation of a sexual harassment policy; regular interactive sessions with employees to increase awareness of sexual harassment and to challenge gender roles and norms; bystander intervention training; and regular data collection efforts.<sup>29</sup> While efforts to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace remain rather limited and fragmented overall, one good practice is to develop specific standards and guidance for addressing sexual harassment based on agreement among employers, unions and government bodies. Ireland, for example, has a code of practice on sexual harassment that gives detailed guidance on how to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. Spain has a similar strategy that sets out specific roles for employers, unions and government authorities in addressing sexual harassment.<sup>30</sup>

49. Other promising examples include awareness-raising programmes for employers (Colombia), training for public sector employees (Georgia and Republic of Korea), and certification programmes that allow private sector to gain recognition of their efforts to address sexual harassment (Rwanda). Japan requires senior civil servants to undergo prevention training before they can be considered for promotion. A programme to address sexual harassment in the tea industry in rural areas of Kenya

<sup>27</sup> UN-Women, "A framework to underpin action to prevent violence against women" (2015).

<sup>28</sup> ILO, *Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work: Trade Union Perspectives and Action* (Geneva, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Donna Chung, Carole Zufferey and Anastasia Powell, *Preventing Violence against Women in the Workplace: An Evidence Review — Full Report* (Melbourne, Australia, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018).

by building the capacity of women and engaging men is an example of a good practice to address the needs of marginalized women and to fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind. However, none of the reporting countries discussed labour inspection standards and practices, which are an important element in preventing sexual harassment in the workplace.

50. Engaging men in the workplace is vital to eliminating sexual harassment. Lessons can be drawn from other effective strategies to engage men in gender equality efforts, including the “HeForShe” campaign, which has brought together 30 male leaders — 10 Heads of State, 10 global chief executive officers and 10 university presidents — as “IMPACT Champions”. As part of that initiative, male leaders make concrete commitments to advancing gender equality, including by mobilizing other men in their organizations to take action.

51. To prevent sexual harassment in educational settings, studies have highlighted as a good practice the “whole of institution approach”, which includes a commitment from leadership, institution-wide and gender-responsive policies that set standards for expected behaviour and values, teacher training, comprehensive sexuality education, a gender-sensitive curriculum, peer support programmes and ongoing evaluation.<sup>31</sup> While few countries reported on a whole-of-institution approach specifically, examples were provided of specific measures such as workshops to combat sexual harassment in primary and secondary education (Barbados, Cabo Verde and Cambodia), curriculum reforms to address gender stereotypes (Jamaica), the provision of human rights education (Greece) and the creation of safe spaces for girls (Eswatini).

52. Preventing sexual harassment in public spaces requires a multi-pronged effort, with comprehensive laws supported by the gender-responsive design of public spaces, along with campaigns and community mobilization efforts to transform social norms that normalize and excuse sexual harassment.<sup>32</sup> Several countries are focusing on preventing sexual harassment in public spaces, including through the engagement of men and boys. For example, Cambodia has engaged tuk-tuk drivers to support women’s safety while travelling and has also engaged young men to speak out against sexual harassment. Some innovative strategies include ensuring the participation of women and girls in the design of public spaces (Mexico), using public transport to disseminate messages about women’s safety and sexual harassment (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) and conducting campaigns in public spaces (Switzerland). Despite a growing number of incidences of online sexual harassment, very few specific initiatives to prevent it were reported.

53. The United Nations system supports efforts to prevent sexual harassment of women and girls. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has created programmes that are focused on women’s safety in urban public spaces, and UN-Women has supported programmes addressing sexual harassment of women and girls in public places through the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces programme. The United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women has also supported several initiatives to prevent sexual harassment of and gender-based violence against women working as market traders, who are among the most marginalized workers.

54. Within the United Nations system, efforts are underway to strengthen zero-tolerance policies, including through awareness-raising activities for staff and town hall meetings, along with efforts to assess the extent of the problem through staff

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<sup>31</sup> Claire Maxwell and others, “Freedom to achieve: preventing violence, promoting equality — a whole school approach” (2010).

<sup>32</sup> UN-Women, “Safe cities and safe public spaces: global results report” (2017).

surveys and to reinforce procedures for responding to cases of sexual harassment and assault. To that end, UN-Women has appointed an Executive Coordinator to oversee the response to sexual harassment, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has designated a Deputy Executive Director as focal point for those issues, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has established an independent expert panel to provide relevant recommendations.<sup>33</sup>

### C. A survivor-centred response to violence against women and girls

55. A range of services are needed to respond to violence against women and girls, with the objective of keeping women safe and supporting them in their recovery from violence. Women's organizations continue to play a critical role in the delivery of services and in setting standards for the provision of high-quality services to survivors from a feminist perspective. There is increasing recognition of the need to support women in gaining economic independence by providing social protection, housing, microfinance and other services to help women to gain access to paid work and economic opportunities.

56. The vast majority of services that Member States reported respond to victims and survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence. Those services were often supported by the United Nations system and inter-agency programmes such as the United Nations Joint Global Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN-Women and the World Health Organization (WHO) in several countries. Such services include telephone hotlines, case management and referral services, counselling, specialized courts, police and justice services, health services for survivors and economic support (Andorra, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liberia, Iran, Myanmar, Qatar, Republic of Korea and Senegal). Only a few countries (Cabo Verde and Cambodia) reported on measures to strengthen the quality of services, through either the setting of minimum standards or professional development, signalling that greater focus is needed in that area.

57. Good practices in responding to sexual harassment include the provision of information on rights; confidential advice and referral services to empower survivors; clear and accessible reporting, complaint and investigations mechanisms; and counselling services offered internally in workplaces, along with external options.<sup>34</sup> Information provided on support services was limited. There are, however, a few promising approaches that focus on encouraging survivors to seek support and report abuse. For example, Slovenia's law to protect the dignity of workers in the State administration has led to the appointment and training of confidential workplace counsellors.<sup>35</sup> In Australia, the military has responded to sexual harassment and sexual violence by establishing an easily accessible one-stop centre that allows for formal and confidential reporting of sexual misconduct and provides comprehensive support services to survivors.

<sup>33</sup> See [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/unaid-independent-expert-panel-on-harassment\\_tor\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/unaid-independent-expert-panel-on-harassment_tor_en.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC, 2018).

<sup>35</sup> Jane Pillinger, "Safe at home, safe at work: Slovenia case study (European Trade Union Confederation 2017). Available at [https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/document/files/slovenia\\_etuc\\_safe\\_at\\_home\\_safe\\_at\\_work\\_final\\_2017\\_0.pdf](https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/document/files/slovenia_etuc_safe_at_home_safe_at_work_final_2017_0.pdf).

58. Some States have highlighted efforts to strengthen services for survivors of sexual violence through the development of coordinated multisectoral services (Chile, Croatia and Romania), guidelines to strengthen the quality of support services (Liberia), and resources to support survivors through the criminal justice process (New Zealand). While sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence, it has not always been clear whether those services to address sexual violence have also been available to women who have experienced sexual harassment. Services for survivors of sexual violence, including services to protect their sexual and reproductive health and rights, should explicitly be made available to survivors of sexual harassment.

## **D. Data and research**

59. The collection and use of data on violence against women is an area that requires urgent attention. There are several forms of violence for which internationally agreed statistical methodologies need to be developed in order to enable a consistent and comparable approach to measurement. Such forms of violence include sexual harassment in public places, workplaces and education settings, and violence against women that is facilitated by technology. Several United Nations agencies are working to develop standards and methodologies in those areas. Even where internationally agreed statistical methodologies exist for measuring violence against women, significant investments are needed to improve compliance with methodological, ethical and safety standards, to achieve sufficient country coverage, to implement comparable surveys over time with a view to understanding trends, and to allow for the comparability of data across countries to produce regional and global aggregates. Data collection also needs to improve with respect to administrative data on women's use of services that address violence against women and with respect to tracking the long-term well-being and socioeconomic outcomes of survivors.

60. Several countries reported on efforts to improve the quality of data on violence against women, primarily in relation to domestic and intimate partner violence, through prevalence studies and better collection of administrative data (Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Cameroon, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Republic of Korea and Switzerland). Some innovative approaches to expanding the knowledge base include the collection of data on violence against women in the media (Argentina), violence against women with disabilities (Cambodia), social attitudes towards violence against women (Colombia) and violence against women in public spaces (Tunisia).

61. Efforts to collect data on sexual harassment have been particularly limited. A key challenge is the lack of an internationally agreed definition, which also hinders the comparability of data across countries. Some good practices in that regard include the collection of data on sexual harassment in universities (Costa Rica) and in public spaces (Chile). There were also limited efforts to track data on online sexual harassment and abuse. With regard to research, the United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society has undertaken research to understand the impact of technology on efforts to end violence against women, including cyberharassment.

## **V. Conclusions and recommendations**

### **A. Conclusions**

62. Violence against women and girls is a grave human rights violation with serious impacts on women's and girls' health and lives, families, communities and society at large. The most marginalized women and girls remain at greatest risk of violence and

harassment. Overall, efforts to prevent violence against women and girls remain piecemeal rather than forming a comprehensive approach that tackles gender inequality as a root cause.

63. Over the reporting period, there has been unprecedented global attention to sexual harassment, which has reshaped the environment in which women's accounts are heard. Widespread reports of sexual harassment highlight the universal nature of the problem, which is deeply rooted in gender inequality and unequal power relations between women and men in the economic, social and political spheres. Sexual harassment affects women in the private and public sectors, in the formal and informal economies, in education and in public spaces. Sexual harassment is experienced by women and girls as part of a continuum of violence against women and girls and has significant consequences.

64. Interventions to address sexual harassment remain inadequate. Many countries lack legal protection against sexual harassment, and even where laws exist, they are limited and do not cover the multiple spheres in which women experience sexual harassment, in particular online and in public spaces. The effective implementation and enforcement of laws continue to be key challenges. Women who have experienced sexual harassment are often denied access to justice owing to a lack of remedies and inaccessible complaint and reporting mechanisms.

65. There are very few examples of comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual harassment in different settings, with specific approaches for workplaces, educational institutions and public spaces. Given the scale of the issue, the prevention of sexual harassment facilitated by technology requires urgent focus.

66. Responses to survivors of sexual harassment also remain inadequate, with very few examples of comprehensive and coordinated services. Given the significant under-reporting of sexual harassment and its normalization, particular efforts are needed to encourage the reporting of sexual harassment and to make existing services that address sexual violence accessible to survivors of sexual harassment. In particular, workplaces and educational institutions need to create safe reporting environments for women and girls to come forward with complaints and to access justice and remedies, without fear of reprisal or further victimization.

67. Rapid advances in technology, with their wide reach and accessibility, have provided avenues through which sexual harassment and abuse are being perpetrated. The scale and impact of sexual harassment facilitated by technology, the impunity of perpetrators and the lack of remedies are significant challenges. Specific measures in the areas of prevention, survivor protection, remedies and perpetrator accountability are required, including the enactment of related legislation.

68. Significant gaps remain in the collection of data on the prevalence of violence against women that are internationally consistent and comparable, in particular with respect to violence against women facilitated by technology and with respect to sexual harassment in public places, workplaces and educational settings. Improvements in that regard are critical for tracking progress, in particular in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals that have the explicit objective of eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

## **B. Recommendations**

**69. States should enact laws that recognize sexual harassment as a form of discrimination against women and a human rights violation and ensure that such legislation addresses multiple spheres, including the world of work, educational institutions, public spaces and online. Laws should provide options for criminal,**

civil and administrative remedies and compensatory provisions, along with providing for accessible, effective and timely complaint and investigations processes and ensuring that complainants are not further victimized for filing a complaint. States should provide systematic training to law enforcement officials to ensure the effective enforcement of legislation and access to justice for survivors.

70. In the world of work, laws addressing sexual harassment should protect women who are engaged in informal and formal work, regardless of their contract type and regardless of whether their perpetrators are co-workers, third parties or clients. Legislation should require employers to take steps to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, including through the enactment of policies and the provision of regular interactive training and by ensuring the availability of complaint and investigation mechanisms. Laws should hold employers, educational institutions and local authorities liable if they do not take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. States should work closely with employers and trade unions to establish codes of practice and guidelines on preventing and responding to sexual harassment. The prevention of sexual harassment should be incorporated into labour inspection regulations and practices.

71. States should develop comprehensive strategies to prevent sexual harassment and to actively engage a wide range of stakeholders, such as women's and youth organizations, the private sector and academia. Such strategies should include awareness-raising campaigns to promote zero tolerance for violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment; educational programmes, including comprehensive sexuality education, that promote gender equality, human rights and the development of skills to build respectful relationships, in formal and non-formal educational settings; and community mobilization programmes to challenge gender stereotypes, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes that condone violence and sexual harassment. States should adopt measures to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in child-rearing, parenting, domestic work and caregiving. States should design urban plans and infrastructure to ensure the safety of women and girls in public spaces and undertake assessments and audits to identify unsafe areas.

72. As part of the prevention of sexual harassment in the world of work, States should implement in tandem measures to realize women's rights at work, including with respect to equal pay, to ensure women's equal representation in leadership positions and decision-making bodies, and to support the balancing of paid work and caregiving responsibilities.

73. States should expand existing services to support survivors of sexual violence in order to provide multisectoral support services to survivors of sexual harassment, including health services (in particular in respect of sexual and reproductive health and rights) and justice, legal and counselling services. States should work with employers and trade unions to ensure that all workers enjoy their rights at work, including informal and vulnerable workers, regardless of contract type or status, and that they have access to information and advice about sexual harassment and access to support services. States should implement specific strategies to encourage survivors of sexual harassment to make use of support services and to file reports, and guarantee adequate and sustainable resources for specialist service providers.

74. States should, in accordance with the principle of due diligence, enact new laws and measures to prohibit new and emerging forms of online gender-based violence. Such laws should be grounded in international human rights law and standards. States should work with technology providers to implement strategies

to eliminate violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. States should also implement specific measures to prevent and respond to violence against women that is facilitated by technology, and invest in research to better understand the problem.

75. States, together with the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders, should develop methodologies to collect data on other forms of violence against women, including sexual harassment and violence facilitated by technology, to ensure disaggregation by relevant factors and the comparability of data across countries and over time. States should also conduct further research on the impact of sexual harassment in workplaces, including the financial and human costs to organizations.

76. The United Nations system should continue to implement comprehensive measures to prevent both sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. Such measures should include updated training and guided interactive engagement with staff to challenge harmful masculinities, discriminatory norms and bias in the workplace. It should also include bystander intervention training to enable staff to identify and respond appropriately to victims and perpetrators in various contexts.

77. The United Nations, across its agencies, funds and programmes, should continue and strengthen existing efforts, including by remaining apprised of the extent of the problem through staff surveys; collecting data that is disaggregated by different factors; strengthening its investigative capacity, including by having investigators with expertise on gender-based violence; ensuring that processes occur in a timely manner; and facilitating the holding of perpetrators to account.

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