

Designing
Safety, Building
Belonging:

Addressing
Gender-Based
Violence in
Urban Spaces

Contents

4	Executive summary
42	Bogotá
118	Louisville
220	Stockholm

Executive Summary

Foreword

Members of the City Hub And Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) are dedicated to reducing gender-based violence (GBV) in public spaces and creating places where women and girls can be active participants in shaping their own neighbourhoods – and by extension their lives. Improving women's sense of safety and belonging in urban public space is not just about reducing acts of overt violence. These incidents reflect a broader pattern of harassment and abuse that often goes unchallenged by bystanders and is inadequately addressed by authorities. Women's sense of safety is bound up in the design, quality, management and maintenance of public spaces, as well as the availability of accessible amenities such as well-maintained toilets, benches and shaded areas. Safety is as much about women, girls and non-binary people's sense of belonging in public spaces and the extent to which a space feels designed for them as it is about freedom from violence and harassment.

In cities globally, women continue to face alarming levels of GBV in public spaces, on our streets and public transport, from everyday sexual harassment to more extreme cases of abduction, rape and femicide. In Bogotá 90% of women report feeling unsafe in public spaces, with overcrowded public transport systems exacerbating the risk of harassment. In Stockholm, a rise in femicides has led to increased concerns about women's safety, while in Louisville, the tragic death of Breonna Taylor in 2020 highlighted systemic failures in law enforcement and the vulnerability of black women in their homes.

City leaders are recognising that spatial planning and urban design interventions are an under-exploited but important tool for tackling women's sense of safety and freedom in their cities. They are motivated and inspired by the possibility of using the resources and power they hold over urban development processes to align with their (often under-resourced) aspirations around the reduction of GBV.

CHANGE is an international network of cities committed to removing structural barriers to women's equality. Through

CHANGE's Declaration to Tackle GBV, member cities pledged to create urban environments where women can safely access services, participate in civic life and move freely through their communities.

In partnership with CHANGE, urban design practice Publica conducted research in three member cities to help bring this declaration to life. Publica leads a campaign for inclusive cities and is uniquely placed to support the design of gender inclusive public spaces. The practice has written design guidance for cities and is a leader in bringing women and girl's voices into urban projects and advocating for the proactive planning of inclusive cities. Through this collaboration, CHANGE and Publica are pioneering new standards for violence prevention that centre inclusion, dignity, and belonging to design cities where everyone can thrive.

This report presents the fieldwork carried out in Bogotá, Louisville and Stockholm. During these visits, Publica interviewed city leaders, undertook design charettes with young women and girls, trained and introduced new approaches to safety with professionals and explored public spaces through a series of creative and participative feminist methods. The research proposes a set of actions for city leaders to take in line with their desire to create safer and more inclusive public environments. It encourages all CHANGE members to learn from the three pilot projects and mainstream gender inclusive design processes in their own cities.

CHANGE member cities are committed to taking action and sharing their learning with one another as part of a global movement to address GBV in public space. To do this cities need to understand the nature of the violence women face, how to measure it, and what actions are effective in not only reducing sexual harm, but also in creating spaces where women can truly participate in all aspects of urban life and feel they belong.

Introduction

The CHANGE cities of Louisville, Bogotá and Stockholm were selected to partner with Publica to conduct fieldwork, training and research to better understand the lived safety experiences of women, girls and non-binary people in public spaces. The project trialled and tested Publica’s creative and participative feminist research methods to identify opportunities to address GBV in public spaces.

The recommendations recognise the need to address skills and confidence gaps in built environment professionals and support municipal workers with the tools and language to mainstream gender inclusion into their projects. The insights from each city reveal the ways in which urban design, public policy and social norms intersect to shape women’s individual and collective sense of safety and belonging in public spaces.

The findings and opportunities for each city are organised according to Publica’s framing of a whole-systems model. This approach recognises the systemic nature of GBV and the need to mainstream gender inclusive policies in all projects and across a range of scales, from investing in community empowerment to supporting cultural shifts. The summary report for each city proposes an actionable set of opportunities for city authorities to adopt new policies and ways of delivering built environment projects in line with their desire to create safer and more inclusive public environments.

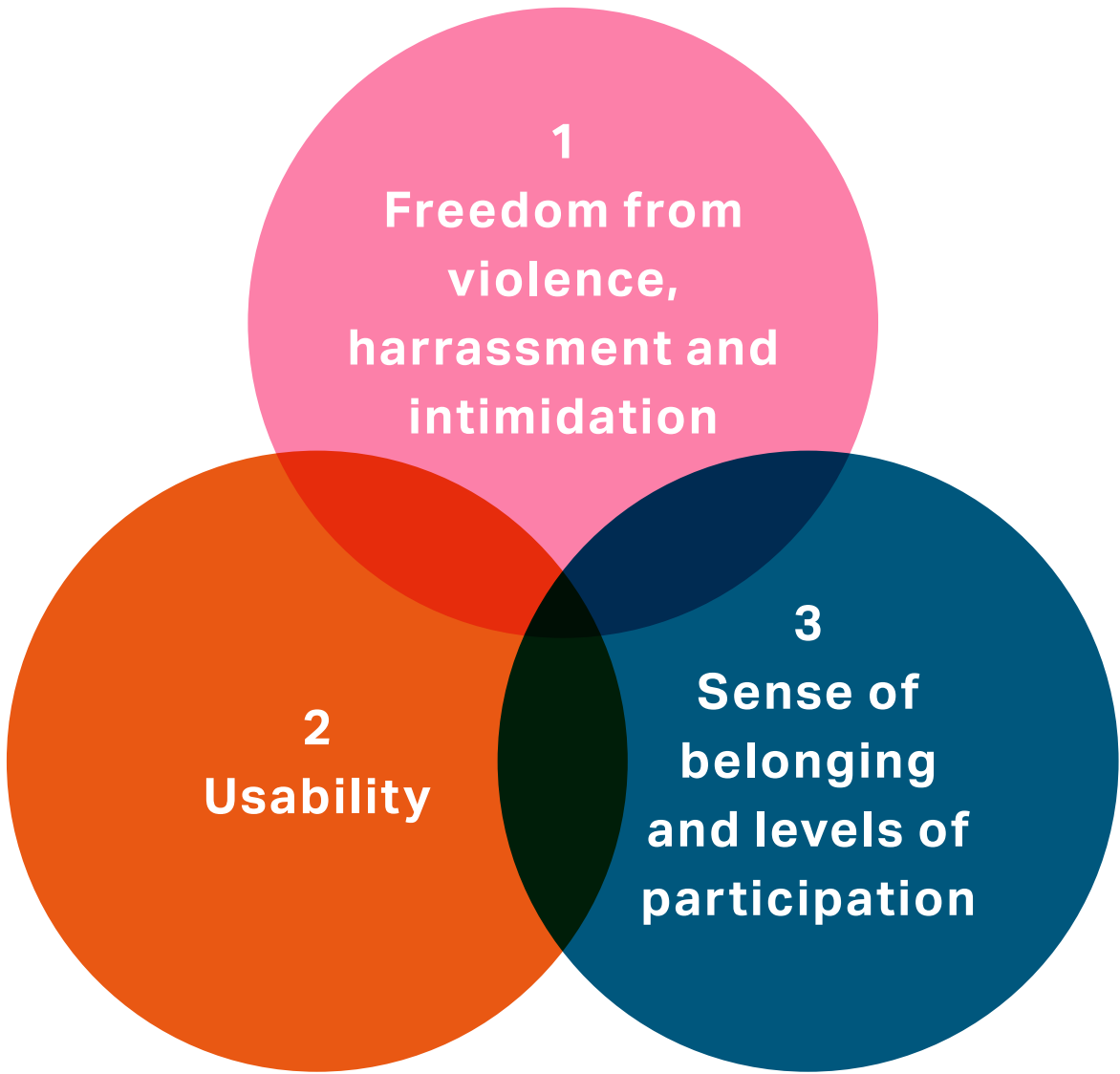
What do we mean by safety?

How do we frame and understand women, girls and non-binary people’s safety in public spaces and what, therefore, can the built environment sector do to improve safety experiences?

This report builds on guidance prepared by Publica. The guidance, written by Dr Ellie Cosgrave, brings together academic research and has been used to train built environment professionals. This report uses two of the frameworks outlined in the guidance to better understand how the safety of women, girls and non-binary people relates to the built environment.

The first framework stresses that safety experiences exist across a spectrum, from mild inconvenience to extreme danger. Women, girls and non-binary people face everyday harms and are exposed to risks when public spaces and infrastructure are not designed for them or with their needs in mind. Issues such as avoiding places after dark or taking longer and more expensive routes home are safety issues that need to be considered alongside more overt forms of GBV.

The second framework emphasises the various lenses through which safety can be understood. The report proposes three lenses of safety: freedom from violence, harassment and intimidation; usability; and a sense of belonging and levels of participation. Safety in public spaces is about much more than the avoidance of crime. It is about the extent to which women, girls and non-binary people feel able to use public spaces and feel as if they belong, are represented and celebrated in the space. Safety is therefore considered much more broadly and the range of possible safety interventions in the built environment is expanded to include strategies to improve the usability of spaces and promote civic participation and a sense of belonging.



Extracts from the Mayor of London’s guidance:
Safety in Public Spaces: Women, girls and gender diverse people
(2024)

A whole-system approach

This research organises key findings and opportunities according to the scale of action required, from community empowerment to cultural shifts.

The findings and opportunities for each city are structured in four parts to reflect the systemic nature of GBV and the need to take a whole-system approach to support gender inclusion. Often also referred to as an ecological model, the whole-system approach we adopt recognises that people’s lived experiences are shaped by social and structural forces that operate at different scales. It is a model for addressing systemic violence against women and girls.

At the smallest scale, people’s personal histories, identities and memberships within social groups and community organisations will shape their everyday experiences of GBV and the agency they have to address issues. Safety needs and experiences will differ from person to person and what feels safe for one person may feel unsafe to another.

At a wider more structural scale, the physical environment, and how it was designed, will also shape how safety and GBV is experienced. Certain features of the built environment may exclude women and girls or contribute to spaces that feel unsafe. Importantly, the ways in which the physical environment is experienced will differ depending on people’s personal histories.

Likewise, both the physical elements of public spaces and the processes through which it is planned, designed and managed, will impact people’s perceptions of safety and feelings of belonging.

The third scale identifies the ways in which the design and management of public spaces are the products of policy decisions, investment strategies and the work of various public and private organisations.

The largest scale includes the cultural norms that shape all the other levels of the model. It recognises that people and policies will be influenced by broader narratives and social constructs such as gender norms and roles.

This research organises our key findings and opportunities for action in each city according to these categories, ensuring that the actions we recommend speak to a wide audience and look beyond physical public realm interventions alone to consider the policies or cultural norms that can be changed to tackle GBV and the important role people and grassroots organisers can play alongside larger institutions and organisations to take action.



Methodology

- 1. Moving Beyond Security-First Approaches**
- 2. Creating Joyful and Creative Spaces for Dialogue**
- 3. Recognising Women's Power, Not Just Their Pain**

Publica's research methodology is rooted in a feminist philosophy of participation, which centres the voices of women, believes their testimony, and creates space for joyful and imaginative exploration of the city. Rather than treating safety as merely the absence of violence, our approach frames safety as the presence of dignity, agency, and belonging. This orientation is both a response to the limitations of traditional policy tools and an affirmation of women's power to shape urban life.

Throughout this study, Publica's ambition has been to strength-test creative methodologies with cities in the CHANGE network and demonstrate opportunities for other cities in the network to understand how similar methods might work in their own contexts. This might include, for example, supporting them to think through the challenges it would address or what the barriers to implementation in their own places would be.

1. Moving Beyond Security-First Approaches

Cities often default to crime and security-based strategies (such as increased policing and security cameras) to respond to GBV. While these represent an important strand of response, an over-emphasis on these approaches without more holistic investments can have harmful consequences. For example, they frequently result in the removal or surveillance of the most marginalised populations, rather than addressing root causes of harm, as Dr. Adonia Lugo (2018) powerfully writes, "We (racialised people) are what gets removed when spaces get safer for you. We're either priced out or policed out". Moreover, security-led responses tend to reinforce a dynamic in which women are positioned as dependent on male authority figures for protection, rather than active agents in shaping safer, more inclusive urban environments. Moreover, these approaches assume that all women feel safe with police or security officers.

In Practice: Street-tagging

Street-tagging is a participatory method that supports people to connect their safety experiences with the features in the public realm. Each participant is given two large round 'stickers': one red and one green. When exploring a neighbourhood together in a group, participants are invited to place the stickers on parts of the street or public space that offers them a sense of safety (green) or incites a sense of fear or exclusion (red), and document these by taking a photograph. In both Bogotá and Louisville, participants stopped at certain places to describe their histories and relationships with certain features or locations and share how this makes them feel. In Bogotá, participants even placed stickers on police officers and construction workers, and had direct conversations with them about the impact of their presence, roles and behaviours on their sense of safety.



2. Creating Joyful and Creative Spaces for Dialogue

The topic of gender-based violence is deeply personal and often painful. It can provoke fear, anxiety and silence. For some, this manifests as hesitation to speak, concerns they are not informed enough about this nuanced topic or afraid of saying the ‘wrong thing’. For others, especially those with lived experience of GBV, participation can carry the risk of re-traumatisation, or pressure to share personal histories before they are ready. In light of this, Publica’s methodologies are designed with these barriers in mind and aspire to create spaces where participants feel safe, informed, respected, and where they have the power to shape the research in accordance with their own lives and experiences. This means designing approaches that allow for flexibility, agency, and choice in how people engage, while nurturing a collective sense of connection, creativity, and joy.



Street-tagging workshop in Bogotá

In Practice: Collage-making

Collage-making workshops can offer a creative space to express visions, aspirations and possibilities for spaces without tightly defining a set of design requirements. Through these workshops, Publica worked with young people to identify where in the city they experience feelings of safety and belonging, and the features and activities associated with them. The workshops also identified the places girls currently spend time in as well as those they typically avoid or feel uncomfortable in. The second half of the workshop invited the girls to take part in a creative collage exercise to design their dream public spaces. These collages were used to frame a discussion around how new developments in the city might better cater for their needs and reflect their lived experiences.



3. Recognising Women's Power, Not Just Their Pain

Focusing solely on violence risks framing women exclusively as victims - flattening their identities and overlooking their knowledge, creativity, and aspirations for change. Women are not only experts in identifying harm, but also in imagining and creating safer, more equitable cities. For this reason, Publica's methodology seeks to expand the conversation beyond fear and into possibility. As Rob Hopkins writes in *From What Is to What If*, "Creating the world we want to live in (...) is the work of imagination". Engaging imagination is not a luxury; it is a critical tool in the work of transformation and this needs to be nurtured as part of urban development processes. The use of games can support people to use their imagination to think more creatively and holistically about the types of actions they can take to design more inclusive public spaces.



Collage-making workshop in Louisville

In Practice: Find the Connections!

Participants are given cards that describe fundamental principles and challenges of gender inclusion in public space. Each participant picks one card and familiarises themselves with the concept. Participants are then invited to explain their card to another participant and come up with another word or concept that connects the two cards. The aim is to support people in understanding the core principles of gender inclusion in public space without having to share personal experiences or specific (and often traumatic) examples. The words participants come up with are then used as the basis for a collective conversation about the root-causes of GBV in public space, as well as the tools and techniques that might begin to address them.



Find the connections workshop in Stockholm

Findings from three cities

Despite their radically different contexts, governance structures and histories, many of the themes and findings from the research resonate across the three cities. In Bogotá, Louisville and Stockholm, the design and management of public spaces was consistently recognised by city leaders as a potentially powerful preventative tool to address GBV in public spaces. Public spaces in all three cities, from parks and residential neighbourhoods to flagship new civic spaces, were frequently identified as spaces designed without the needs of women, girls and gender diverse people in mind. The exclusion and marginalisation of women's voices in urban design and planning projects undermine their ability to feel a sense of belonging in public spaces.

The methods described above were tested in all three cities and city officials and partners were invited to join training sessions and demonstrations of Publica's research methods with women, girls and gender diverse people. Publica compiled a report for each city, detailing the activities undertaken and summarising the findings from extensive engagement with city officials and community leaders. These reports provide an overview of the types of issues that face women, girls and gender diverse people in public spaces

Each city report includes recommendations for ways to mainstream these participative and gender-inclusive approaches into all public realm projects. The reports include international case studies of best practice to facilitate knowledge sharing between CHANGE cities and facilitate innovative and effective actions in the three cities.

“Safety in public is about having your everyday needs met and having a system that cares for and supports you. It also helps to see other women and children around and services for them in public to say this space is for someone like me”.

Research participant in Louisville

“Everyone in theory has responsibility over safety but we all have very different tools and budgets to act on these priorities — there is less funding available for preventative work”

City official in Stockholm

“Building safety for women doesn't have to create authoritative security. We need to be able to demonstrate that safety can happen through the reinvention of public spaces.”

City official in Bogotá

Bogotá

“Enclosure and private security are false promises of safety”

Research participant in Bogotá

“Participating in the street tagging workshop in my childhood neighbourhood left me feeling seen, valued, and encouraged that the future I envision in Smoketown and the city of Louisville, specifically for black and brown women, is possible”.

Research participant in Louisville

“Male designers often suggest that they shouldn’t be the ones working on women’s safety. I’d argue the opposite, that this a broad responsibility and is about basic professionalism. The quest? A gender-educated practice with the capability of listening.”

Rebecca Rubin (2022)



Main findings

Bogotá's Secretariat for Women (*SD Mujer*) has developed world-leading programmes to support caregivers, promote gender inclusion and tackle gender inequities by providing accessible services and facilities for carers. The city government is looking to embed principles of gender equity in the delivery and management of public spaces and new transport infrastructure, ensuring that the city's largest municipally-led projects consider and respond to the specific needs of women, girls and non-binary people. The partnership with CHANGE and Publica explored the ways in which feminist principles can be further integrated into large, complex and multi-year projects such as the delivery and construction of the city's first new metro system, which is the most significant project being led by the city.

The accompanying report outlines the research and fieldwork undertaken in Bogotá. It identifies opportunities to consider how construction sites are managed and monitored to mitigate the impacts on women and support safety and accessibility. It identifies opportunities to build on the successes of pioneering projects such as Care Blocks and transport services such as La Rolita to co-locate care infrastructure in accessible locations and ensure public services are delivered by and for women. In the long-term, there are opportunities to think about how all built environment projects and public investment can draw on the lived experiences of women, girls and non-binary people to ensure their needs are considered in all projects and across all stages of a project, from the procurement of contractors to the maintenance and management of public spaces.

The research suggests that achieving these ambitions will require sustained cross-departmental working. There is an opportunity for SD Mujer to contribute to design project briefs and support with the procurement of contractors to ensure that their strategic goals are written into all projects and evaluated against. SD Mujer also maintains extensive research and data that could be better used to inform built environment processes.

Opportunities

Community groups and individuals

1. Ensure women's voices are embedded across the entire lifecycle of major infrastructure projects
2. Provide financial and institutional support to women-led organisations responding to the impacts of urban development
3. Reinforce the Safety Corridors programme through co-auditing and locally-led upgrades
4. Invest in crime prevention strategies that are community-informed.

Physical environment

5. Fund neighbourhood-scale safety projects to design public spaces, activate streets and provide amenities
6. Use care as a framework to guide neighbourhood design and service delivery
7. Activate underused spaces through co-design, including beneath elevated infrastructure
8. Expand gender inclusion training for technical teams delivering built environment projects
9. Research and develop a city-wide night-time strategy

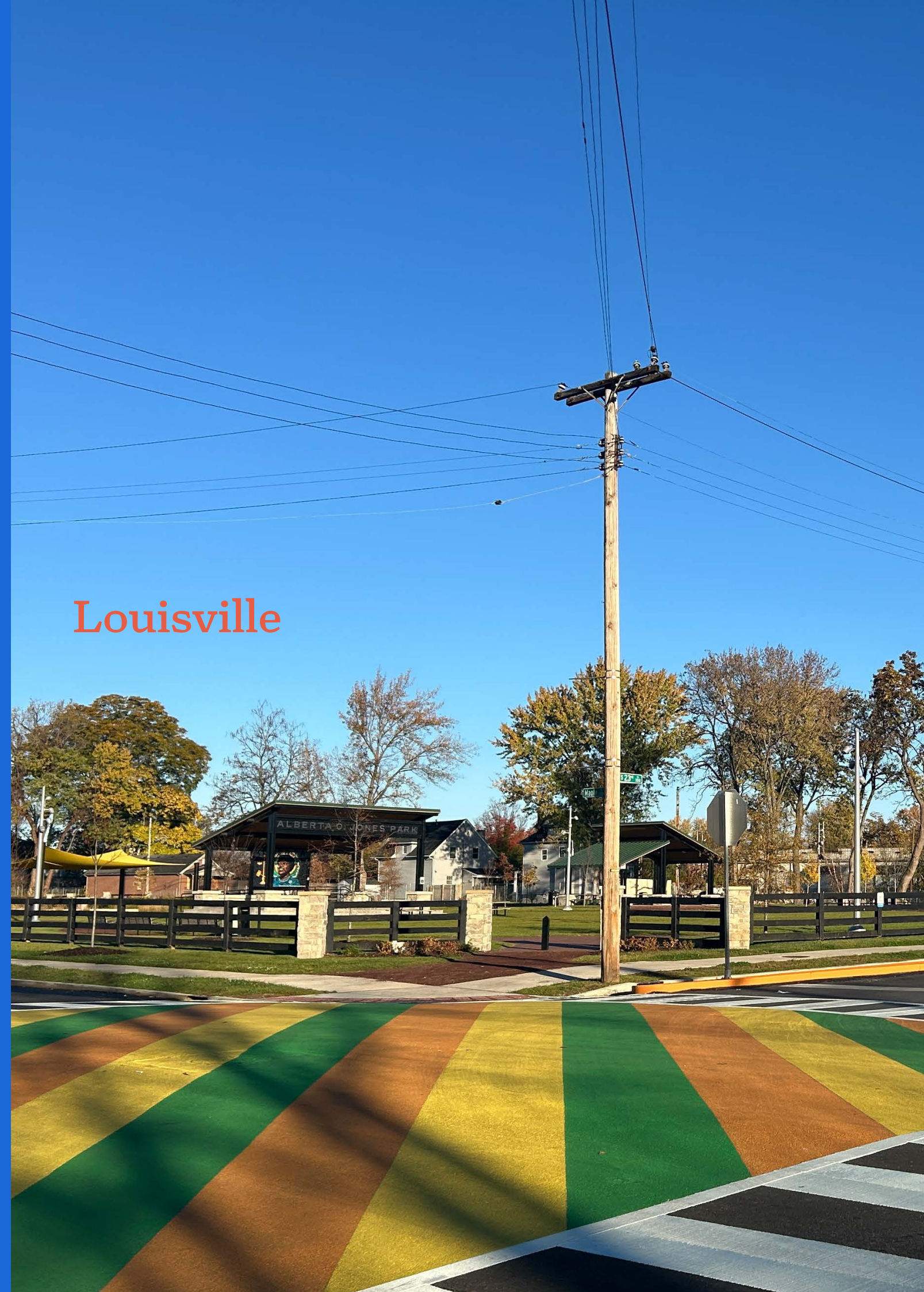
Policy and organisations

1. Embed care into Bogotá's large-scale mobility systems
2. Institutionalise gender and care as core metrics in procurement and funding frameworks
3. Connect Care Blocks through spatially legible "care corridors" at neighbourhood scale
4. Expand cross-departmental training to support care and inclusion mandates

Cultural norms

1. Pair public messaging with training and a robust reporting infrastructure
2. Embed GBV prevention into the design of public spaces and infrastructure
3. Quantify and communicate the social and economic cost of GBV

Louisville



Main findings

Publica's research and fieldwork in Louisville identified an opportunity to radically rethink the way that safety in public space is considered, spoken about and built into public realm projects. Safety is currently narrowly considered through the lenses of violent crime and road safety. However, for many women, girls and non-binary people living in Louisville safety is as much about their sense of belonging, welcome and the care they feel in their neighbourhoods and public spaces as it is about freedom from violence. Issues of affordable housing, displacement, lack of public seating, poor quality pedestrian infrastructure and inadequate maintenance of public spaces contribute to the sense that some parts of the city are uncared for, inaccessible to pedestrians and, by extension, unsafe. This is particularly exacerbated after dark, where some streets are unlit and many public spaces have little public life.

The accompanying report identifies opportunities for the Office for Women, and the network of Office for Women Ambassadors across the city who are offered leadership training and mentoring, to more formally and consistently be involved in design projects and support direct and participatory engagement with women, girls and non-binary people to shape the planning, design, delivery and maintenance of public spaces. The recommendations and opportunities outlined in the report call for a much broader understanding of safety as a foundational requirement for developing thriving neighbourhoods and meeting strategic priorities. It identifies the challenge of embedding principles of gender inclusion in new developments that often fail to improve the conditions of public spaces.

This research challenges the Office for Women and other city departments and leaders to expand the set of tools and actions they can take to address GBV. It emphasises the need to do this in partnership with communities, recognising the ways in which people's intersecting identities create different lived experiences and safety needs. It also highlights the costs, both social and economic, of not investing in safe, accessible, usable and welcoming public spaces.

Opportunities

Community groups and individuals

1. Implement a programme of community engagement to inform neighbourhood safety and management systems
2. Deliver active bystander training
3. Celebrate women's stories in public space through murals, signage, statues and memorials
4. Invest in women-led local businesses and events

Physical environment

1. Give women and other community representatives a seat at the table and decision making power about their own neighbourhoods
2. Co-design public spaces with local women, girls and gender diverse people
3. Contract Office for Women Ambassadors as experts in public space redevelopment projects
4. Upskill the urban development sector with training and guidance on gender inclusive design principles
5. Include gender inclusion in the development code
6. Develop a night time strategy

Policy and organisations

1. Embed gender inclusion actions and reporting into government processes and grant requirements
2. Conduct a study assessing women's transportation needs
3. Establish a gender equity in public space task force
4. Ensure city procurement secures community benefits
5. Include gender considerations in project briefs
6. Develop training for Office for Women Ambassadors to facilitate public engagement and act as community connectors
7. Have the Office for Women at the table in all policy decisions that relate to women's safety
8. Collect and share gender disaggregated data

Cultural norms

1. Implement a women's safety charter campaign in NuLu and around the Lynn Family Stadium
2. Develop training for businesses
3. Roll out a public awareness campaign



Stockholm

Main findings

Stockholms stad is leading an ambitious programme of public realm improvements, transport upgrades and housing developments in neighbourhoods across the city. There are significant opportunities to embed gender inclusive urban principles into the design, delivery and maintenance of these projects by more creatively, formally and systematically listening to women, girls and non-binary people's experiences.

The research identifies and celebrates recent examples of best practices across the city, from murals designed and painted by young people in underpasses and places identified as being unsafe through community safety walks to new pavilions and shelters designed with and for women and girls. The accompanying report suggests how these interventions could be scaled-up and incorporated into larger projects. There is also a need to more consistently develop and fund public space management plans to ensure that where new public spaces are delivered, the programming and managing of these spaces is considered through a gender and safety perspective.

The principles of gender inclusive public spaces could more formally be mainstreamed into all built environment projects through the appointment of dedicated gender inclusion project leads or the involvement of community safety teams in design review meetings. There are also opportunities to work more collaboratively with businesses and the teams that will be managing new public spaces to support the delivery of programmes that support women, girls and non-binary people to develop a sense of safety and belonging in public spaces. More broadly, the research ends with a call to action and challenges the widely held belief that gender equity issues have been resolved in Stockholm.

Opportunities

Community groups and individuals

1. Develop processes and methods in public realm design projects to give a voice and power to women, girls and non-binary people
2. Use the holiday internship programmes to train young people to act as community researchers to inform the briefs of public realm projects and survey their neighbourhoods
3. Work with architecture schools to build capacity and skills to use creative engagement methods in design projects

Physical environment

1. Continue to engage with the girls and young women in Rinkeby to bring them into the Rinkebytorget project as it moves through the design and construction phase
2. Co-design public spaces with local women, girls and non-binary people
3. Explore opportunities to secure public access to toilets and changing rooms in Slussen
4. Identify potential evening and night time occupiers for the indoor gallery space that will extend opening hours and provide passive surveillance of the space and explore the use of public art, lighting installations or sound recordings to improve perceptions of safety
5. Invest in maintenance and management plans for public spaces

Policy and organisations

1. Identify women's safety leads for every public realm project
2. Convene public space management teams early in the design of projects to feed into the design
3. Bring businesses into partnerships to develop local safety action plans or a women's safety charter
4. Support a range of businesses to open later

Cultural norms

1. Disaggregate survey data according to different characteristics including race, ethnicity, employment status or disability to understand how safety experiences differ across groups of women
2. Formalise a process to ensure all public spaces should be designed to support women's safety and explore opportunities to get project teams to report and be monitored on their commitments

Next steps and call to action

1. **Dive Deeper**
2. **Test Globally**
3. **Learn Together**

Dive deeper

Louisville, Bogotá and Stockholm are already taking action and delivering on the opportunities identified. In Louisville, the city has organised artist-led night walks and additional engagement with women and girls to inform the ‘Broadway all the Way’ public realm project. The Office for Women has provided input into the Department of Transportation’s new Complete Streets Checklist to review the checklist through the lens of gender equity. Office for Women Ambassadors are receiving additional placemaking and planning training to increase their capacity to comment on development plans and shape projects through a gender inclusion lens. In Stockholm, the Executive Office is exploring opportunities to use participative and consensus building tools such as Citizens’ Assemblies to inform their work. In Bogotá, the city is exploring ways to ensure gender inclusion principles shape the procurement for the upcoming second phase of the metro construction.

There is scope in all three cities to build on the networks and partnerships developed through this research and deliver more of the opportunities identified by this research. Many of Publica’s research methods and engagement tools were deployed in the three cities to demonstrate their potential but these could be used to inform current and upcoming design and infrastructure projects. Likewise, the participants who took part in events could be more formally convened into community steering groups for projects and re-engaged throughout the lifecycle of projects.

Test globally

The research identified common challenges occurring in very different contexts. In all three cities, the fear of violence shapes the behaviours of women, girls and non-binary people of all ages in public spaces. City officials, workshop participants and politicians all recognised the potential to design their streets and public spaces to better prevent GBV and create safe, welcoming and inclusive environments.

The project proposed a set of approaches, principles and methods that can be rolled-out in other cities within the CHANGE network. There is an opportunity to create new place-specific evidence to support policy-makers to address common challenges. There is also an opportunity for Publica to work in other cities to support built environment professionals to develop new skills and set new best practices in gender inclusion in cities within the CHANGE network.

Learn together

There is an opportunity to share Publica’s knowledge and expertise across the CHANGE network and to collectively develop new approaches to design safer public spaces for women, girls and non-binary people. Through knowledge sharing networks, demonstrator projects, field trips and case study research, all of the cities in the CHANGE network could learn from Publica’s work in Bogotá, Stockholm and Louisville and create their own programmes of action to tackle GBV in public spaces.

“Publica has changed our city. They have lit a fire in so many people, from planners to community members to teen girls, to feel like they can impact the streets and parks and public spaces around them. The work they have done will leave imprints for generations to come.”

Gretchen Hunt, Louisville Office For Women

“I’m so grateful for this activity today, and how enriching it was. In the past 63 years, I have rarely felt heard or seen.”

Research participant in Bogotá

“We can be better at involving more and different people into our urban development processes — we more or less always hear from the same people”

City official in Stockholm

Bogotá

Contents

46	Executive summary
48	Background and context
50	Methodology
52	What we did
54	Introduction to Bogotá
60	Community Groups and Individuals
74	Physical Environment
86	Policy and Organisation
100	Cultural Norms
112	Summary of key findings and opportunities
116	Acknowledgements

Executive summary

Bogotá has developed an internationally recognised and world-leading District Care System. The pioneering initiative seeks to reduce, redistribute and recognise unpaid care work, which is disproportionately carried out by women. The city has built a network of services and facilities to make care work more visible and valued. The programme also seeks to ease the burden on caregivers, promote their economic autonomy and provide access to educational opportunities by providing access to social, educational, health, and wellbeing services within their neighbourhoods.

Improving the safety of women is a top priority for the current administration and the city is currently mainstreaming approaches to embed principles of gender equity and safety in the delivery and management of public spaces and infrastructure.

This report explores the ways in which the feminist principles of safety, inclusion and equity can be integrated into large, complex and multi-year urban planning and design projects such as the delivery of the new metro infrastructure. This investment in public transport represents the largest urban project in the city and there is a clear ambition to embed principles of gender inclusion and women's safety from the outset of the project.

In the short-term, there are opportunities to consider how large construction sites across the city are managed and monitored to mitigate the impacts on women and support safety and accessibility. The emphasis on creating safe construction sites will ensure that the metro system as a whole feels safer once it opens.

In the longer-term, there are opportunities to think about how all projects and public investment can provide new public and civic spaces at the neighbourhood scale that are fully integrated into their surroundings and provide comfortable, welcoming and accessible spaces during the day and after dark. Civic amenities and urban design interventions, such as providing additional seating and lighting, can be built into all projects to create safer streets and public spaces. Engagement with women and girls should take place in all projects and across project lifecycles to support these ambitions and ensure that the experiences of women and girls are considered in all projects. If these ambitions can be met on the largest and most complex urban project in the city, it can act as a blueprint for how to mainstream these approaches into all projects.

There is an opportunity to build on the successes of projects and partners that have supported the delivery of the District Care System such as Care Blocks, the city's GBV services and the public transport operator La Rolita. The principles of co-locating care infrastructure in accessible locations and ensuring services are delivered by and for women, demonstrated by these projects, can inform the delivery of other projects.

This research finds that achieving this ambition will require further cross-departmental working. There is an opportunity to support the Secretariat for Women (*SD Mujer*) to feed into project briefs, share their research and data, support procurement and monitor project delivery to mainstream these principles into all projects and share lessons and best practices within the city government and internationally.

Background and context

About this report

This report summarises Publica and CHANGE’s collaborative project “Designing Safety, Building Belonging: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Urban Spaces”. The study explores how design and the built environment can make cities safer, more usable and more welcoming to women, girls and gender diverse people. The project draws on research and fieldwork in Louisville, Stockholm and Bogotá to understand how these cities are currently integrating gender inclusion principles into their policies and strategies to develop safe public spaces. This report documents the second of these site visits and explores the relationship between women’s safety and urban development processes in Bogotá.

The report builds on fieldwork, engagement and research to develop a set of urban design and policy recommendations that address the most pressing challenges around women and girls’ safety in public spaces. The research is intended to support the municipal government’s gender mainstreaming work in the development of the city’s public realm and public transport. It provides resources and lessons for partner cities within the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) wanting to design safer public spaces in their own geographies.

About CHANGE

The City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) is an international network of 17 cities dedicated to advancing the rights of women, girls, and people with diverse gender identities. We support cities in strengthening infrastructure, transforming social norms, and enhancing essential services for women. We work on 3 thematic areas: care, gender-based violence, and gender data.

About Publica CIC

Publica Community Interest Company (CIC) is a London-based non-profit organisation offering policy guidance, resources, toolkits, workshops and training to advance public discourses and professional practices around designing inclusive cities. Publica CIC leads a campaign for inclusive cities and conducts research and advocacy to better integrate gender inclusive design principles and the experiences of women, girls and non-binary people into built environment projects and policies through the use of creative and participatory methods.

Methodology

Publica conducted a week-long research and engagement programme in Bogotá in February 2025. The visit was organised in collaboration with the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) and *Secretaría Distrital de la Mujer* (SD Mujer) Bogotá's Secretariat for Women led by Secretary Laura Tami. SD Mujer is the body responsible for leading the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Public Policy for Women and Gender Equality, as well as for mainstreaming the approaches of women's rights and gender into district plans, programmes, projects and other public policies. The purpose of the visit was to understand how Bogotá's gender equity agenda is translating into urban practices. The research had three aims:

1. To identify institutional barriers and opportunities for integrating gender equity across the planning, construction and governance of the city's new metro system
2. To understand how women experience safety in public spaces
3. To test participatory tools and methods that centre lived experiences of marginalised groups

CHANGE and Publica organised workshops and site visits in collaboration with SD Mujer. These were attended by municipal government leaders and officers, including Secretary Laura Tami, representatives from the built environment sector, local residents and community groups. This included municipal representatives from the city's Transport department and its affiliated entities, such as the Metro Company and the private concessionaire for Metro Line 1, TransMilenio, the District Transport Operator La Rolita, the Road Maintenance Unit and the Urban Development Institute. Representatives from the Housing department, including the Popular Housing Fund, the Administrative Department of Public Space, the Culture and Security departments were also involved in the project.

The representatives who participated in this research were the technical professionals from each department responsible for mainstreaming gender perspectives within their institutions. In addition, they will be responsible for leading the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Each workshop and site visit explored a different theme. The first workshop looked at the municipality's ambitions and current programmes to prevent and address GBV; the second explored metro construction site conditions and labour practices; the third shared strategies for cultural transformation to prevent and address GBV and harassment in public spaces; the fourth studied neighbourhood-level impacts of the metro construction; and the final workshop sought to develop communications and campaigns around safety and public life.

The fourth workshop was held in Barrios Unidos to hear directly from residents, care workers, women and community leaders. The neighbourhood marks a dividing line between two areas with different socio-economic characteristics and has seen extensive construction work linked to the new metro system. The workshop included a participatory street-tagging walk, a method in which residents use physical tags to mark places or objects in the public realm that either support or undermine their sense of safety, care and belonging. This walk enabled women to share their lived experiences in the area and articulate site-specific concerns, both historic and current, around issues such as poor quality pavements, unlit spaces at night and poorly managed construction waste. Although limited to a single workshop, the engagement showcased some of the creative methods that can be used to hear directly from women about their experiences to shape the design and management of public spaces.

Publica also visited the Manitas Care Block, La Rolita's bus depot and the San Felipe arts district to understand some of the innovative, creative and world-leading policies being developed by the city. Finally, Publica facilitated a training session with 30 municipal officers and the First Lady of Bogotá, Mrs Carolina Deik, on public campaigning and communications around GBV, highlighting international examples and best practices. A final roundtable brought together senior officers from multiple departments to reflect on key insights and identify priority actions following the week of fieldwork.

What we did



Training community members on how to survey their neighbourhoods through street tagging



Listening to feedback from women that took part in the street tagging exercise



Hosting and facilitating the project champions' aspirations workshop



Fieldwork with the Women's Secretariat, the Metro and TransMilenio



Facilitating community-led street tagging



Cross-departmental training workshop with the First Lady to explore campaigns and communications



Learning from La Rolita, a women-led bus service



Training workshop regarding gender based violence in public spaces



Working with community organisations conducting neighbourhood fieldwork



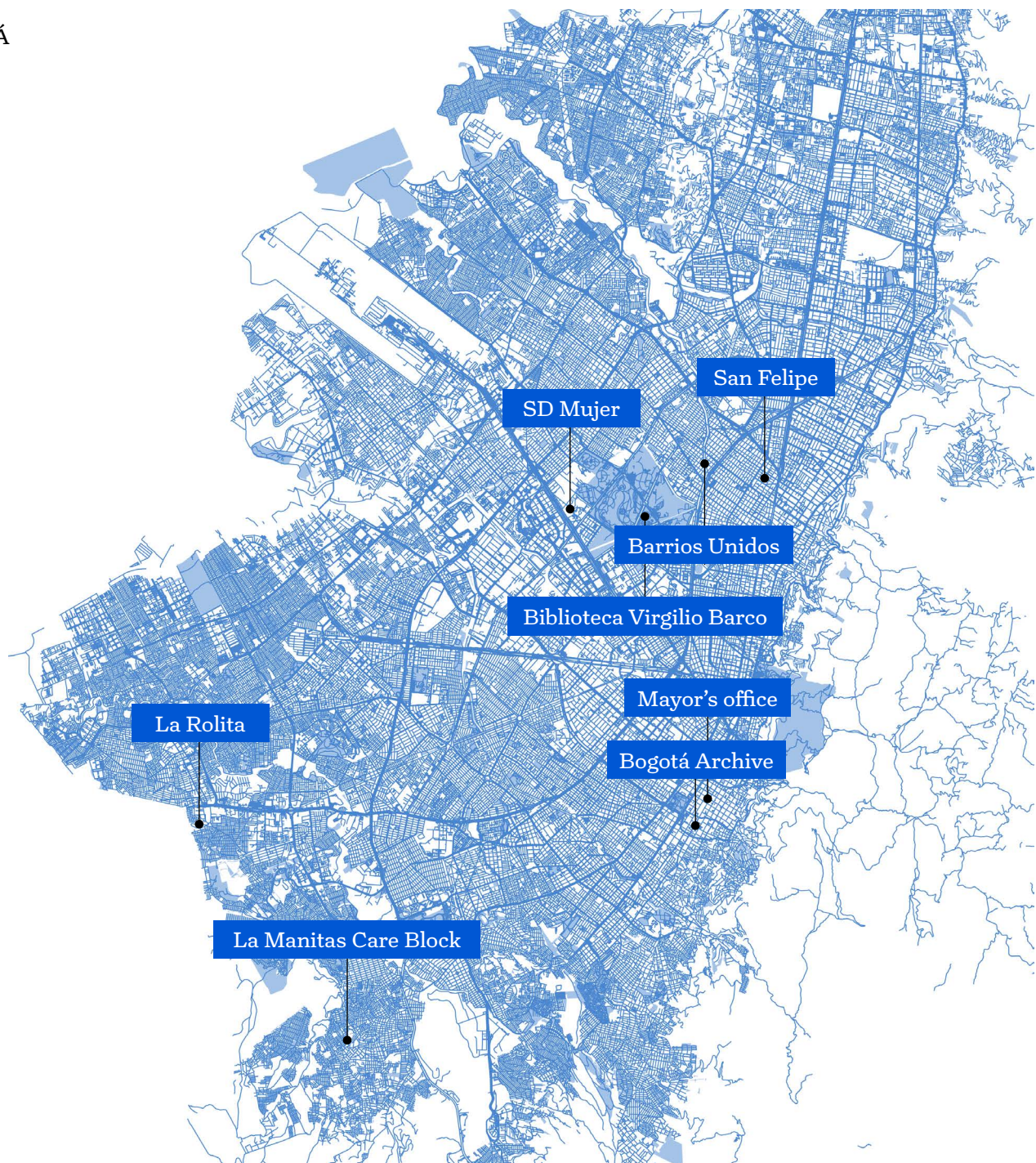
Facilitating feedback and reflection session with champions

Introduction to Bogotá

City snapshot

Population: 8,181,047
Land area: 1.775 km²
Daily journeys: 14,860,000
Density: Approx 4,310 residents per km²
Poverty rate: 3,8% of the population lives in poverty (2022)
Ethnic composition: Mestizo: 42.7%; White: 36.5%; Afro-Colombian: 1.5%; Indigenous: 0.5%; Other: 18.9%

BOGOTÁ



Themes

Feminist city leadership

GBV is a systemic issue in Colombia and women in Bogotá experience high rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and femicide. In recent years, Bogotá's municipal government has shown international leadership in its efforts to address GBV in public spaces and challenge the normalisation of violence and the marginalisation of women in public life.

This current feminist leadership can be traced back to the role of women's grassroots organisations advocating for peace, justice, and gender equality during the country's decades-long period of armed conflict. In the face of forced displacement, sexual violence, and systemic marginalisation, these movements laid the groundwork for mainstreaming feminist perspectives into municipal governance and addressing GBV as a systemic issue.

The establishment of SD Mujer in 2012 marked a significant milestone in the institutionalisation of gender equality and women's rights within the city's governance. Prior to this, the city had made progress through planning instruments such as the Equal Opportunities Plan for Gender Equity (2004) and the Public Policy for Women and Gender Equality (2010). The election of Claudia López in 2019, Bogotá's first female and openly homosexual mayor, saw the city further mainstream and prioritise the development of inclusive urban policies. Under her leadership, the budget and scope of SD Mujer were expanded, and world-leading initiatives such as the *Manzanas del Cuidado* (Care Blocks) were launched. The current mayor, Carlos Fernando Galán, pledged in his 2023 manifesto to continue to expand the programme, improve women's safety and tackle GBV, particularly on public transport, as he pledged to complete the first line of the new metro.

Within the framework of the current government plan, SD Mujer addresses gender inclusion and safety through a systemic and holistic framework, which includes five key pillars:

- Eliminating physical, psychological, and sexual violence
- Eliminating violence against women in politics
- Eliminating sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces and on public transport
- Eliminating economic violence and securing a right to housing
- Building a culture free of sexism

These five pillars are shaping the delivery of new infrastructure projects in the city. Following the roll-out of a Bus Rapid Transit System in the early 2000s, the city is now delivering two new metro lines. The city has set an ambitious agenda to embed gender inclusive principles in the design, management and operation of these new transport systems and public spaces to support the safety of women, girls and non-binary people.

Gendered differences in mobility

Before the year 2000, Bogotá's public transport comprised a fragmented system of privately operated buses and *busetas* (minibuses). These vehicles operated without centralised oversight, leading to issues such as congestion, slow and unreliable services and safety concerns.

Plans to establish a public transport system in Bogotá date back to 1942. In 2000, following decades of stalled plans to develop a metro, a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system was established instead to provide fast, reliable mass transit by bus. The TransMilenio bus network was publicly delivered and funded but is operated privately through a public-private partnership (PPP).

The TransMilenio system significantly reduced travel times, improved the reliability of transport services and delivered fast north-south connections. This linked peripheral, rural and informally settled areas with commercial employment centres. This new connectivity was particularly beneficial for low-income women and caregivers who often undertake multiple trips to meet caring responsibilities and work commitments.

Today, TransMilenio facilitates 4 million trips per day, making it the largest BRT system in the world. However, the system's success has led to overcrowding and a growing demand to create better east-west connections. Reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence on public transport, particularly at peak hours, are high with a 2014 survey finding that 64% of women reported being sexually harassed while using public transport (SD Mujer, 2014). The rates have risen as reporting services have expanded.

The city is constructing its first two metro lines (Lines 1 and 2) to increase capacity, enhance services and better connect peripheral neighbourhoods. The system is being delivered by the public body *Empresa Metro de Bogotá* (the Bogotá Metro Company) and is being funded through a PPP. The Empresa is funded through both municipal and international funding, including from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the World Bank. The 28-year contract for the design, construction, delivery, operation and maintenance of Line 1 was awarded to the Chinese APCA consortium in 2019. The 24-kilometer elevated line, featuring 16 stations, is projected to begin commercial operations in March 2028. The procurement for the design, delivery, operation and maintenance of the underground Line 2 is currently underway.

International finance

Large-scale infrastructure in Bogotá is increasingly delivered through PPPs with international contractors. While such partnerships provide access to finance and expertise, they also create risks and reduce the public accountability of these delivery vehicles. These models fragment governance and municipal actors must navigate complex distinctions of ownership and responsibilities between city and commercial actors to ensure that contracts and the procurement of services support the city's ambitions and principles.

Despite these risks, the city is using external funding to pilot world-leading programmes to support gender equity and facilitate knowledge exchanges to share its expertise. Larger programmes are funded directly by the city's municipal budget.



Community Groups and Individuals

This chapter highlights the expertise and organising power of women in Bogotá who are actively shaping the city's development.

Insights

1. Bogotá has a network of engaged women leaders and organisers but their inclusion in infrastructure projects remains inconsistent

City officials and transport representatives from SD Mujer, TransMilenio and the Empresa Metro emphasised the importance of addressing the gendered differences of mobility patterns when planning, designing and operating the new metro system. There was a consensus that women and girls' voices must be included early on and throughout the metro project.

This has led to unprecedented collaboration between the public and private sector and across institutional departments. For example, SD Mujer is supporting the Empresa Metro and TransMilenio by providing access to their extensive gender data observatories to support the planning of their systems. The department is also training the engineers and site-managers building Metro Line 1 to raise awareness of GBV and the potential impacts of construction on women and girls' safety.

The development of the new Metro Line 1 has also seen the piloting of new engagement methods and governance structures. This includes establishing women-led community boards such as *Mujeres Metro Bogotá Línea 1* (Women of the Bogotá Metro Line 1) to regularly engage with Empresa Metro and the consortium planning and delivering the infrastructure. Each of the city's districts have also allocated a budget to conduct site visits and convene working groups with residents to assess the construction's impacts on their neighbourhoods. Participants in Barrios Unidos felt that this accelerated the resolution of

recurring issues, such as waste management and hoarding, as they now had a direct way to advocate for their needs to the construction site managers.

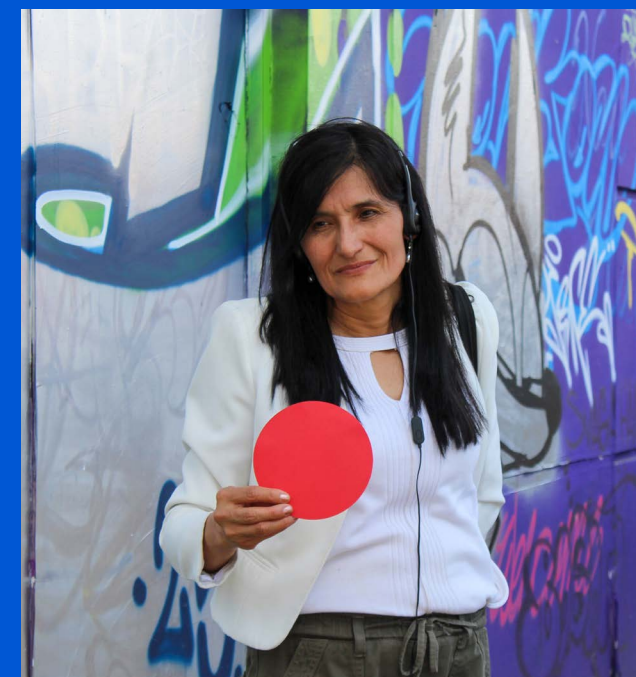
During our fieldwork, we met organisations led by women and caregivers looking to be meaningfully involved in shaping the metro project. For example, in low-income areas particularly affected by construction, such as Barrios Unidos and Barrio Colombia, women are leading citizen observatories, organising mutual aid networks and protests. Participants in our street-tagging workshops felt that it was essential for them to be involved in the development of their neighbourhoods. However, this engagement takes time and places some of the burden of monitoring and mitigating the impacts of the project on those being impacted. Women felt that this arrangement created gaps in accountability, engagement fatigue, and frustration among

“This is hard work for us, and it sometimes feels like an eternal fight, but the fact that we have been able to highlight planning blind spots and prove the need to centre women’s rights at the heart of this project is a victory in and of itself (...) We need strategies for community care in construction projects that will last and impact us for years.”

community organisers. As one woman put it: Despite these challenges, the formal inclusion of women and community organisers in the governance of the project ensures that the impacts of the construction on the everyday lives of residents is reported on and considered by project managers. This addresses a recurring challenge of bringing the lived experiences of women into projects and demonstrates the value of establishing systems that allow for continuous long-term engagement.

The advocacy and engagement work of Bogotá's women leaders has led to significant long-term impacts. This has included the creation of periodic meetings between the Empresa Metro, the Local Operational Committee for Women and gender Equity (COLMYEG), and the Houses of Equal Opportunities for Women (CIOM) located in every district of the city. There are now multiple institutionalised and formalised spaces where the voices of women are heard and their concerns can be raised and addressed by key institutional actors and metro project leaders.

This formal governance and engagement has also led to the creation of a community monitoring mechanism for women's rights, promoted by the group *Vendedoras de los derechos de las mujeres de la Troncal 6 de la Línea del Metro 1*. This group repeatedly brought up the continuous harassment they experienced when passing by construction sites and successfully lobbied for Empresa Metro and SD Mujer to deliver GBV training for subcontractors and labourers on site. Women involved in our workshops had noted a drastic decrease in harassment since then. Many of these activists have scaled their advocacy work and launched formal associations to meet local needs, demonstrating powerful leadership and piloting bottom-up, grassroots urban change.



Local Highlight

Cecilia Pinzón is a grassroots leader from Barrios Unidos. She is a former business owner operating two shops near the Bogotá metro construction site. Her livelihood was severely impacted by the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and street closures linked to the construction.

Cecilia founded Women Against Hidden Poverty to support other women in similar positions: those over 35, excluded from the job market, responsible for caregiving and experiencing what she calls “invisible poverty”. The organisation delivers skill-sharing and micro-enterprise programmes (including embroidery and baking), peer-led rights education, and mutual support systems. Cecilia undertook several SD Mujer training programmes, and gained certifications in women's rights, leadership, and legal literacy, which helped shape the development of her organisations. This training gave her the tools and confidence to articulate the systemic nature of what she and others were experiencing. When programmes like SD Mujer's are embedded locally and tied to lived experience, they do more than inform - they can catalyse agency, activate networks, and seed new models of feminist organising at neighbourhood scale.

2. Urban development and large infrastructure projects can worsen women's experiences of harassment and sexual violence

Leaders of the metro project recognised that the multi-year construction of the system could negatively impact safety. The project team responded by designing a Safety Corridors programme. The programme sets guidelines for the management of existing public spaces and the maintenance of construction sites by, for example, retaining pavement access or managing waste. It also increased police presence and patrols to deter criminal activity in and around construction sites. However, the programme was inconsistently delivered. In more affluent areas such as Concepción Norte, pavements surrounding construction sites were even, lighting was consistent, and public realm features such as hoarding, signage and drainage had been carefully maintained. Just across the street in Barrio Colombia, however, we saw damaged sidewalks, uneven hoarding, accumulated waste, minimal lighting and narrow, inaccessible sidewalks. One participant said:

“We see how the other side looks — lit, swept, safe. To have such a contrast, just one street over, makes us feel like we don’t matter.”

The construction has also significantly impacted women's mobility, economic security, and personal safety. Many women shared that the construction amplified existing exclusions and heightened the impacts of a lack of infrastructure and services in lower-income neighbourhood.

Participants of the workshops also shared that GBV was often experienced alongside economic marginalisation. Participants in Barrios Nuevos and Barrio Colombia shared how altered pedestrian routes, loss of street-lighting, reduced footfall, combined with increased debris, poorly maintained construction hoarding and late-night anti-social behaviour had escalated risks of harassment, theft, homelessness, drug-abuse and violence in their neighbourhoods. The violence reported was extreme, with

some participants sharing that their experiences of violence had occurred the same morning as our visit. We visited the site of the femicide of a 14-year-old girl in front of a construction site that had occurred only a few weeks prior. The workshop participants expressed that the transformation of the street environment and the uneven delivery of Safety Corridors had led to a sense of abandonment and their communities being hollowed out.

“The street changed overnight. For every five shop here, 2 or 3 were owned by several women from the same household. We lost our customers, our businesses shut down - and we started fearing for our life walking home.”

Many women-led businesses reported a drop in footfall, an inability to safely access their shopfronts, a lack of night-time policing and a general perception that their areas had become unsafe, uncared for or unregulated. This was especially acute in informal or low-income contexts where access to alternative revenue streams, from online sales and deliveries for example, and business support is limited.

In response to these challenges, the city piloted additional support. Metro contractors offered women affected by construction a chance to apply for jobs within the metro system. However, many of these roles required digital literacy or specific technical qualifications that excluded many older women, caregivers and informal workers. The city administration has offered training and upskilling opportunities and SD Mujer is hoping to address this barrier with free courses and training and there are opportunities to work in partnership with the Secretariat of Economic Development to provide additional support.

Community pressure has also led to notable interventions. A new partnership between community leaders, the Mayor's Office, and Empresa Metro has led to the launch of weekly night walks.

These walks serve both as a safety measure and as an informal site audit - highlighting missing or broken light fixtures, unclear routes and public maintenance issues. The partnership model includes municipal officers, SD Mujer, and women from affected communities, and serves to empower local groups.

Across all 20 of Bogotá’s districts, further institutional support is being developed through initiatives such as *Impulso Local*. The district-led programme provides micro-grants of 3 million pesos to women-owned businesses affected by the metro works. This strategy, combined with participatory budgeting (which currently allocates 50% of the city’s budget), has allowed for diverse communities to reinvest in the development of their neighbourhoods.

The Empresa Metro also launched the *Metro te Acompaña* (the Metro Accompanies You) strategy. The initiative seeks to foster citizen participation and strengthen civic culture around the construction of Metro Line 1. A variety of activities, such as workshops, neighbourhood meetings, informational tours and outreach sessions with local businesses promote open dialogue, a sense of belonging, and greater community ownership of the project. These engagement and outreach activities are supplemented by the establishment of on-site information points set-up near areas of construction to allow residents to access support or share their concerns. The cross-departmental project allows for community feedback and issues to be gathered and supports the Empresa Metro to meet local needs and mitigate the impacts of construction on nearby communities.



Construction site in Barrio Nuevo, showing the inaccessibility of the public realm.



Inaccessible and poorly maintained public spaces designated as “Safety Corridors” around construction sites.



Community participants engaging with Metro management staff.



Pedestrian spaces used by motorcycles were reported as being intimidating.



Participants “tagging” unsafe construction site conditions.



Participants showing the stark contrast across the street, from one neighbourhood to another, both adjacent to the same construction sites.

Opportunities

1. Ensure women's voices are embedded across the entire lifecycle of major infrastructure projects

Establish mandatory protocols for women's participation at all phases of a project - scoping, procurement, implementation and evaluation - by establishing roles for women in monitoring bodies or setting up community observatories and gender advisory panels for projects before construction phases kick-off.

2. Provide financial and institutional support to women-led organisations responding to the impacts of urban development

Identify neighbourhoods and commercial corridors most affected by Metro construction and allocate targeted funds to support businesses to keep trading. Support grassroots groups like the *Vendoras* and Women Against Hidden Poverty with long-term contracts, funding or service agreements.

3. Reinforce the Safety Corridors programme through co-auditing and locally-led upgrades

Conduct detailed site-by-site assessments of all of the Safety Corridors in partnership with women in affected districts, promoting their active participation in identifying risks and proposing improvements. Based on their recommendations, implement upgrades such as enhancements to lighting, signage, waste management and the removal of hazardous elements. These actions should promote accessibility and create safe conditions for carers by creating wide and level footways to support people with strollers or mobility needs.

4. Further invest in crime prevention strategies that are community-informed.

Deploy trained safety officers or civic patrols - separate from militarised policing or private security - who work in partnership with local women to deter harassment, intervene when they witness harassment and maintain an official presence in areas most affected by construction or antisocial behaviour, especially at night.

Case Studies



Image: City of Paris



Image: City of Melbourne

Inclusive design guides, Paris

Between 2016 and 2021, Paris launched three ‘Gender and Public Space’ guides aimed at urban planners and those responsible for the development, planning, organisation, programming, and regulation of public spaces. They draw on a variety of skills: architecture, construction, and planning, and social cohesion The initiative includes participatory approaches like women-led exploratory walks, *Réveils du genre* training breakfasts, and diagnostic pilots across six neighbourhoods, all aimed at making streets, parks, lighting, and public furniture safer, more welcoming, and inclusive.

City of Melbourne Inclusive Design Guide

The City of Melbourne’s Inclusive Design Guide provides practical advice to support accessible, safe and equitable public spaces. It embeds inclusive design principles into decision-making, eliminating barriers to participation and complementing Gender Impact Assessments. Developed through consultation, research and data analysis, the Guide draws on best practices and industry frameworks. It targets designers, planners, developers, and decision makers, offering actionable strategies across the lifecycle of built environment projects. The Guide is being tested in live projects, supported by industry feedback and academic collaboration. It also underpins staff training, policy integration, and cultural change, advancing inclusive, long-term improvements in Melbourne’s built environment.

Physical Environment

This chapter explores how Bogotá's built environment shapes women and girls' experiences of safety.

Insights

3. The design and maintenance of public space is central to women's experiences of safety and inclusion

Bogotá is one of the fastest-growing cities in Latin America. It faces intense spatial pressure from informal urban growth, car dependence and the fragmented delivery of infrastructure. In many rapidly urbanising areas of the city, pavements are narrow and kerbs are uneven. In many cases, accessible infrastructure for disabled people, older adults and caregivers is largely absent, contributing to the exclusion of these groups from public spaces. For many women and girls, public space is not a space where they feel they belong or can move through safely.

“I want my teenager to live wildly and freely, but I am worried that from the moment she steps outside our home, she will be the object of violence.”

City officials we spoke to reflected that within this context, infrastructure is often delivered as efficiently as possible. We also heard that the administrative departments that deliver and coordinate public spaces, housing, transport infrastructure and community safety remain siloed from one another and male-dominated. The teams responsible for gathering qualitative gender data told us that their findings rarely translate into the procurement briefs or priorities of infrastructure delivery teams.

In the context of the delivery of the new metro system, there is an opportunity to learn from the deployment of Care Blocks across the city to consider the ways that transport and care infrastructures are integrated into neighbourhoods. Transport stations can be thought of much more ambitiously as sites of

public life and civic amenity and designers of these new public spaces should think about the routes to and from stations, the quality and accessibility of new public spaces and the ability to signal that public spaces are inclusive, welcoming and safe.

Given the elevated nature of Metro Line 1, there may be specific opportunities to consider the covered public spaces beneath the infrastructure and ensure that these spaces feel welcoming. This could include detailed lighting studies, investment in green infrastructure, public art commissions, the inclusion of kiosks or small commercial spaces to encourage passive surveillance and activate these spaces. Although the new system is being delivered efficiently, there are missed opportunities to work more closely with SD Mujer to write public space design briefs and deliver public realm improvements.

Bogotá already has examples of how grassroots-led urban development can regenerate neighbourhoods. We visited San Felipe, a neighbourhood that has undergone a bottom-up transformation driven largely by women, artists, cultural producers and entrepreneurs. Once an overlooked area characterised by auto shops, San Felipe is today one of the city's most active cultural districts. Residents reclaimed industrial buildings for galleries, studios and creative spaces, installing murals, signage, lighting and planting with minimal public funding. Events like Open Felipe draw hundreds of visitors, displaying the neighbourhood's self-led placemaking.

“Even here, where we have influence and know our neighbourhood so closely, we close our shutters and doors most of the day. Harassment and theft are still real. Until the city sees our safety as part of urban design, we stay at risk.”

Under President Iván Duque (2018-2022), San Felipe was designated an “Orange Development Area”, recognising its

cultural and creative contributions as part of Colombia's "Orange Economy" strategy. More recently, Bogotá's municipality selected the area for its pilot of the *Barrios Vitales* (Vital Neighbourhoods) programme, supported by the World Bank. Inspired by Barcelona's Superblocks, this programme applies tactical urbanism interventions - wider sidewalks, reconfigured intersections, public seating, improved lighting - to reframe streets as places of care, creativity and civic presence. San Felipe offers an example for how neighbourhood-scale interventions can enhance urban safety through design.

The city's Land Use Master Plan promotes the transformation of 33 additional neighbourhoods through the *Barrios Vitales* programme. These areas have been prioritised as strategic spaces for urban renewal through housing improvements and investments in social infrastructure. Currently, the District Secretariat of Mobility is implementing four additional *Barrios Vitales* in the neighbourhoods of El Porvenir, San Blas-20 de Julio, Las Cruces-San Bernardo and San Carlos.

Most neighbourhoods in Bogotá do not have detailed urban design guidelines or codes, long-term maintenance frameworks or shared accountability mechanisms. The quality of public space remains inconsistent across the city and poorly designed and maintained public space contributes to people experiencing public spaces as unsafe. This link between cared for, well-designed built environments and safety is essential, as one of SD Mujer's officials shared:

"To build looking for beauty calls us to participate and interact with the environment around us. When you frame the city through efficiency, you end up calibrating your outputs for the 'average' users and not the lived realities of most people. So good design and safe design is also about ethics and aesthetics."



Local Highlight

Innovative transport programmes, such as Ciclorrutas and Ciclovía have demonstrated how transport infrastructure and public realm interventions can intersect to produce dignity and joy at scale.

The *Ciclorrutas* network now spans over 600 kilometres making it one of the most comprehensive cycling networks in Latin America. It offers women and carers an affordable, sustainable mobility option that supports multi-stop journeys, which are essential for those balancing paid and unpaid work.

Ciclovía, the Sunday

pedestrianisation of major roads, transforms car-dominated arteries into civic spaces. Each week, over 1.5 million residents take part in cycling, walking, dancing, street markets and protests. On our visit, we witnessed how these events activate entire corridors: informal economies flourish, intergenerational groups gather and the city's large and inaccessible traffic arteries become momentarily reclaimed for collective urban life.

These programmes show that scalable public realm programming can radically shift spatial patterns and urban rhythms. They foster social cohesion, leading to an increased sense of safety and belonging for women and girls.



Reclaiming the public realm in San Felipe



Reducing traffic, increasing the presence of art and culture programming, and spill outs.

4. The night time character of the city shapes how women use and navigate public spaces after dark

Night time in Bogotá fundamentally changes who uses public spaces. Shutters close, street activity recedes, and the public realm contracts, leaving many areas dominated by men and stripped of the rhythms of care, commerce and community that define daytime urban life.

This transformation is acutely felt by women and carers. We heard repeatedly from participants that they avoid public spaces after dark - not out of personal preference, but as a necessary strategy for survival. In some districts, this self-imposed curfew begins as early as 5pm. Fear of harassment and assault is heightened by poor lighting, empty pavements and a lack of safe transport options. These contribute to women feeling insecure and unable to access help if they need it.

“Once it is dark, we do not leave our house. Past 5pm, the streets become unusable for us”

Only 17% of public transport trips in Bogotá occur at night. The reasons for this include a lack of late-night services, irregular schedules, poorly lit stops and the perceived and actual threat of violence. For women with night shifts, caregiving duties or long commutes, the absence of safe, reliable transport at night can lead to economic precarity and physical risk.

“Being a woman in this city can be lonely. It becomes even lonelier at night, because I know I cannot step outside my house.”

Bogotá at night remains under-researched and under-funded. The night time economy is not only a generator of jobs and cultural vibrancy but also a tool for gender inclusion, economic resilience and public health. Reframing the night as a space for care, culture and community, rather than solely risk, requires rethinking policy, business licensing, urban design and mobility

through a gender lens. The absence of this institutional framing and appropriate research such as disaggregated night time data means that the lived experiences of women after dark are still largely invisible to decision-makers.

In San Felipe, the threat of theft and physical aggression has led many businesses to shut at night, thereby reducing passive street surveillance, with a knock-on increase in anti-social behaviour and a shrinking night time economy. Business owners shared first-hand experiences of theft and violence. Many felt that private security alone would not be enough to counter the issue but wanted nonetheless to operate at night. Business owners installed festoon lights and signage and activated ground-floor commercial units across the neighbourhood. These approaches were not only deployed as security features, but as design tools to support local economies, create passive surveillance and breathe life in the neighbourhood after dark. The neighbourhood is home to many independent restaurant, bars, cafés and stores—from thrift shops to bookstores and barbers— that spill out onto the pavement to support passive street surveillance and animate public spaces at night.

The neighbourhood’s creatives and artists have begun to reclaim the night as a space of culture and creativity. Initiatives such as *Noche San Felipe*, a recurring night time festival, invite residents and visitors to experience the neighbourhood’s galleries, bookstores, studios and public spaces after dark. These events feature live music, workshops, late openings and coordinated lighting interventions that transform the area’s atmosphere.

TransMilenio has begun piloting night time safety patrols and participatory engagement around mobility systems after dark as part of their TransMiLabs data analysis programme. An officer from SD Mujer noted that:

“Safety should be thought of in terms of how the safety will be built for us — how is it cleaned, lit, and how that decreases our sense of risk especially at night. This will stop us being so vigilant — this is, I think, understanding safety through an entirely different perspective.”

Night time urban life in Bogotá remains marked by exclusions and fear, especially for women. As it stands, Bogotá does not have a city-wide framework for understanding night time urbanism through a gender lens, nor does it have the policy language to account for the sensory, emotional and practical realities of navigating public spaces at night. The risk, then, is that night time continues to be a time where exclusion is normalised and responsibility for safety is displaced onto individual women, rather than embedded in the design and maintenance of the city itself.

If Bogotá is to advance its ambitions for gender-inclusive planning, it must take seriously the full 24-hour experience of its residents. This includes commissioning qualitative night time data, investing in low-cost, high-impact infrastructure upgrades and working directly with women’s networks to design neighbourhoods that feel active and welcoming after dark.

Opportunities

1. Fund neighbourhood-scale safety projects to design public spaces, activate streets and provide amenities

Shift safety planning from reactive policing to proactive urban design by embedding gender-inclusive design principles into project briefs. Fund small-scale, high-impact interventions - lighting, seating, signage, and accessible pavements - in neighbourhoods affected by metro construction and in low-income barrios. Collaborate with community groups, artists and creatives to activate the city from the bottom-up. Require collaboration between SD Mujer, local leaders and technical agencies from the outset.

2. Use care as a framework to guide neighbourhood design and service delivery

Position care as a lens for neighbourhood development. Leverage the inclusion of care as a core principle of the city's development plan to take action at the neighbourhood scale. Encourage public realm project leaders to partner with SD Mujer and local care workers to integrate care infrastructure into land uses, mobility and public realm strategies.

3. Activate underused spaces through co-design, including beneath elevated infrastructure

Prevent spaces beneath and around elevated metro lines from becoming sites of insecurity or neglect by integrating them into Bogotá's public realm strategy. Develop a co-design partnership that includes SD Mujer, local municipalities, and community organisations to determine the function, stewardship and aesthetic treatment of these spaces. Apply similar approaches to other underused spaces across the city to support passive surveillance, strengthen local identity and street-level vibrancy.

4. Expand gender inclusion training for technical teams delivering built environment projects

Deliver mandatory training on spatial inequality, GBV and inclusive design principles for engineers, architects and planners involved in major infrastructure projects. Ground this training in local conditions through partnerships with SD Mujer and women-led community groups. Build internal capacity within public agencies to integrate social and spatial expertise across all stages of design and delivery.

5. Research and develop a city-wide night-time strategy

Commission a comprehensive night-time study using gender-disaggregated data on mobility, care, labour and access to amenities. Build on grassroots night walks, TransMiLabs and community-led research to understand where gaps in safety and access to amenities emerge after dark. Partner with business owners, designers and local women to provide guidance on the design of thresholds between public and private space - including lighting, façade treatments, permeable frontages and extended hours - to activate street life and support passive surveillance. Ensure any night time strategy or plan considers gender deeply and supports women and girls' safety at night.

Case Studies



Image: Lucy Saunders

TFL Healthy Streets, London

Transport for London’s Healthy Streets framework provides a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to embedding safety, wellbeing and accessibility into all aspects of street design. The programme centres the experience of pedestrians and cyclists, focusing on everyday infrastructure like benches, lighting, crossings, and tree cover to create welcoming, walkable environments. Importantly, the framework is underpinned by ten indicators, including “people feel safe”, “everyone feels welcome”, and “things to see and do”, making it easily adaptable for gender-inclusive urban metrics. It has informed the delivery of hundreds of street redesigns across London and is used as a policy standard across the Greater London Authority and Transport for London, the city’s transport authority.



Image: City of Buenos Aires

Gender Based Violence Map, Buenos Aires

The GBV Map provides a tool aimed at the collection, processing, and analysis of information to guide public care, prevention, and awareness policies related to gender violence. Using geospatial mapping technology allows the city to target efforts to tackle GBV in high-need locations, with the goal of creating environments where women feel more safe.

Policy and Organisations

This chapter examines how institutional systems, governance structures and the delivery of services shape the city's ability to mainstream gender equity principles.

Insights

5. Organisations in Bogotá are piloting new ways to consider gender equity in the delivery of services and infrastructure

During our workshops with city officers and department leads, we heard that in the public sector, the technical delivery of infrastructure is often prioritised over the delivery of social benefits. Officers we spoke to cited “minimal engagement with on-site personnel” and “a lack of strategic coordination across sectors” as key barriers to consistently delivering social value.

Many local government officers across multiple departments cited changing mayoral administrations as factors leading to the “erosion of past efforts”. Without secure and long-term funding, programmes to advance gender equity are often limited to short-term pilots or need to adapt their programmes to shifting political agendas. Officers also reflected that lived experiences are rarely treated as valid inputs in planning processes and project managers are rarely required to report on their efforts to advance gender equity.

Despite these challenges, our visit highlighted the ways in which organisations that centre gender inclusion, such as the public bus operator La Rolita, can drive change and create safer public spaces.



Local Highlight

La Rolita is Bogotá's first bus company to have gender and sustainability at the core of its operations. It was launched in 2022 as a complementary and alternative system to the largely privatised TransMilenio system.

La Rolita is a fully public operator designed with a feminist, inclusive and sustainability-centred ethos. In its own words, it aims to:

“Reimagine how public services are provided, focusing on the social and economic conditions of the people who deliver them.”

La Rolita is 80% publicly-funded and operates under the technical and operational coordination of the public transport system TransMilenio, with a mandate that explicitly centres inclusion, sustainability and labour dignity. It seeks to redress the gender imbalance in the city's transport workforce—amongst its 16,000 drivers, only 2.6% are women.

Unlike most private operators that prioritise central routes with high fares, La Rolita's first 10 routes serve Usme and Ciudad Bolívar - two southern districts marked by poverty, informal housing and high rates of GBV. In doing so, it fills a critical service gap for low-income women navigating long, fragmented journeys managing caring responsibilities, domestic work and shift-based employment. The company's depot is located within this part of the city, anchoring stable jobs and infrastructure in neighbourhoods often left outside the city's economic core.

What distinguishes La Rolita is not simply its location, bus fleet or technology but its structure and model. One-third of its drivers are

single mothers. Contracts guarantee social security, formal benefits and eight-hour capped shifts - countering the exploitative conditions common in the subcontracted public transport sector. Pregnant employees are offered adapted duties, maternity protections and spaces for breastfeeding. The organisation has invested in menstrual health, created rest and breastfeeding rooms and partnered with vendors to offer access to food, toilets and menstrual products along the route. It acknowledges the unequal distribution of care work onto women in the community and offers multi-generational employment within the same family units.

“I used to work from 4am to midnight with no breaks. Here, I know I have rights (...) I know I’ll get home to see my children, and that they can be taken care of here if they need to”

The initiative also targets exclusion in technical fields. It offers specialised training for women in Electric Vehicle (EV) maintenance, a sector historically dominated by men. The programme has upskilled nine women in electrical and mechanical operations to date, aiming to grow a technically skilled workforce.

La Rolita has shown that service-providing institutions, when intentionally designed around care, can play a transformative role. This ethic of linking mobility, dignity, climate and care is rare in the public sector. But La Rolita proves it is possible, and replicable. One of the managers shared with us that the reason for La Rolita’s success and the increasing demand for their fleet and services expansion was due to the fact that:

“We have a culture of care across everything we do (...) and that is why we are able to change mindsets through demonstrating things people thought was unacceptable or impossible.”



Community allotments open to the public at La Rolita’s transport depot.



Breastfeeding rooms at La Rolita, one of the many co-located services they offer their staff at their main depot and offices.

6. Care Blocks are a world-leading and radical approach to support care workers and enable thriving communities

Bogotá's Care Blocks are the spatial outputs of the city's District Care System, as established in the Land Use Master Plan. Led by SD Mujer, Care Blocks are a city-wide and cross-departmental approach to redistribute, recognise and reduce women's unpaid care work and offer services for those who care for others or require care themselves.

It is one of the most ambitious municipal efforts globally to place unpaid care work at the centre of urban planning and social service provision. The Care Blocks spatialise this approach, bringing together an integrated offer of educational, health, wellbeing, training, and income-generating services closer to caregivers and their families.

Each Care Block operates at a neighbourhood scale, offering a co-located suite of services that directly respond to the needs of residents. The services constantly adapt according to the feedback of users. Services include physical therapy, legal aid, skills training, early childhood care, support for elderly or disabled family members, self-defence classes and healthcare. GBV services are also co-located in Care Blocks, including psychological and legal support. Care Blocks become safe places where women can speak to one another and access help and support if they are victims of domestic abuse. These services are located within or near public facilities such as libraries, schools, and sports centres, allowing users to access multiple essential amenities within walking distance. To date, 25 Care Blocks have been implemented across all districts.

“Before the Care Block, I never had a space to rest or do something just for me. Now I can leave my mother safely, and study again.”

The programme is data-led and SD Mujer actively collects and maps gender disaggregated data to identify areas of highest need.

This evidence base directly informs the placement and services offered at each Care Block. The result is a spatial strategy that responds to localised needs and systematically targets the structural conditions that reproduce gender inequalities.

What sets Bogotá's approach apart is the institutional framing of the programme. Care is treated as a matter of spatial and gender justice. Care Blocks are not stand-alone programmes but embedded within the *Plan de Desarrollo Distrital* (City Development Plan), with dedicated budgets, staff and inter-agency collaboration. The city's land use and transport masterplan includes policies supporting Care Blocks and makes reference to “care territories”, prioritising the co-location of services and safe public spaces near care infrastructure and the key routes to and from these to ensure that Care Blocks are accessible and do not become “islands” of safety.

There is an opportunity to further deepen cross-departmental integration of the programme, particularly with the *Secretaría del Hábitat* (Housing department), *Instituto de Desarrollo Urbano* (IDU) (Department of Urban Development), and transport agencies to ensure that investments in care infrastructure are not confined to social programmes but shape the spatial form and development of the city, as they do in Ciudad Bolívar.



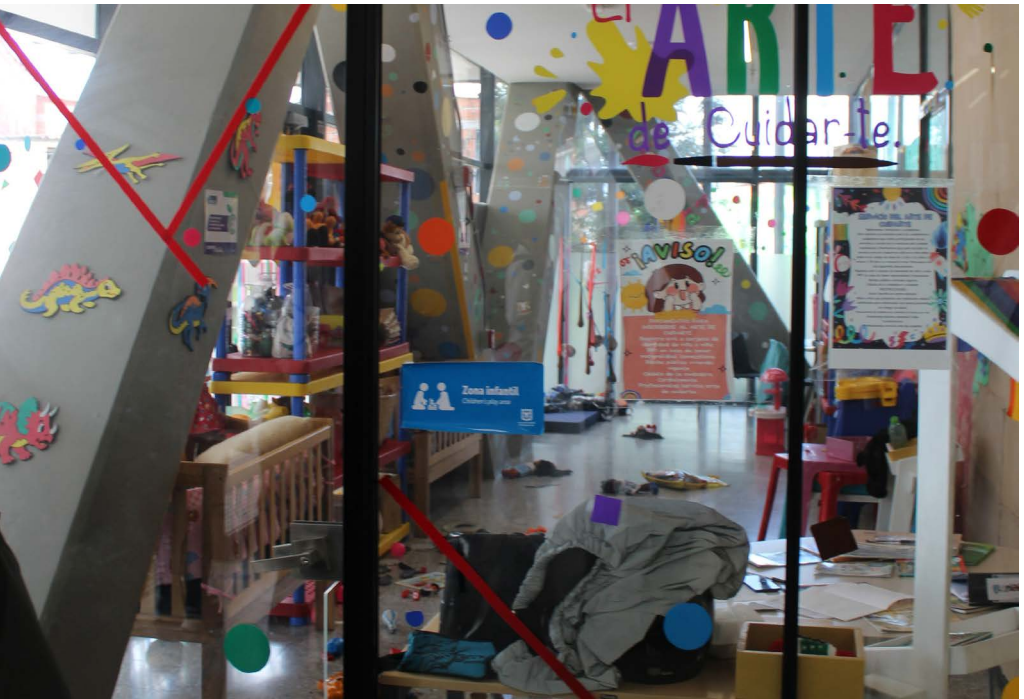
Located under the cable-car Manitas station, the Care Block is made available to informal settlement neighbourhoods



The main entrance of the care block, under the cable-car station.



The Manitas laundry space, located one street from the Care Block, an encouraging model of spreading services in an immediate, walkable area.



Arts and creative centre for children, located in the care block.

Opportunities

1. Embed gender inclusion into Bogotá's public transport systems

La Rolita has shown that transport providers can champion labour rights and gender equity. Bogotá should extend these principles across its larger transport networks, including TransMilenio and the metro operators, by revising procurement and operational models to mandate inclusive employment practices such as shorter shifts and the provision of care infrastructure in workplaces to support more women into paid work in the transport sector.

2. Institutionalise gender and care as core metrics in procurement and funding frameworks

Many public contracts still lack binding requirements for suppliers to support gender equity or social value. To change this, Bogotá should embed gender, care and inclusion criteria directly into procurement language and grant conditions with measurable KPIs, dedicated budget lines, and enforcement mechanisms. La Rolita's show how funders and contracting authorities can shape delivery cultures. This should apply across the transport, housing and infrastructure sectors.

3. Connect Care Blocks through spatially legible "care corridors" at neighbourhood scale

While Care Blocks provide critical access to co-located services, the physical public realm connecting them remains fragmented and exclusionary, turning institutional sites of care into "islands". Bogotá could pilot "care corridors" that integrate pavements, lighting, seating and wayfinding along key routes. This would spatialise the ethos of Care Blocks beyond their walls and embed care into the city's form - improving safety, access and visibility for carers navigating daily trips. These corridors should be co-designed with users and delivered with local stewardship models.

4. Expand cross-departmental training to support inclusion mandates

Bogotá should deliver mandatory gender and safety training across agencies including transport, policing, housing, security and planning.

Case Studies



Image: Mama Lucy Hospital

Integrated GBV Response and Safe Shelter Strategy, Nairobi
Nairobi City County has developed a multi-sectoral approach to tackle GBV, rooted in coordinated response, survivor support and institutional reform. Under Governor Sakaja’s administration, the county established “Tumaini Clinics” across 46 public health facilities, offering psychosocial care, forensic support, and legal referrals, which is anchored by GBV champions in each sub-county. They are also constructing a new safe house and scaling up operations at the Kayola Girls Centre, a historic rehabilitation facility now being adapted to serve as a shelter for women and girls escaping violence.



Image: Freetown Caring City

Freetown Caring City
The “Freetown Caring City” project aims to transfer an innovative care solution between two CHANGE cities, to adopt and adapt the Care Blocks model from Bogotá to Susan’s Bay – Freetown’s largest informal settlement. The project integrates childcare, green public space and economic empowerment for women to reduce unpaid care burdens and create safer, more inclusive community infrastructure. A single building will host child care, professional training, health services and community engagement activities. Because care duties also expose women and girls to sexual violence and transactional sex, access to healthcare for sexual and reproductive health and rights will also be central to this initiative.

Case Studies



Image: LA Transgender Advisory Council

The Transgender Advisory Council, Los Angeles

In 2016, the City of Los Angeles became the largest city in the United States of America to establish a permanent council of transgender and non-binary community leaders to advise the City on how to best serve the needs of transgender, non-binary and gender expansive residents. The Transgender Advisory Council (TAC) advises the Mayor, City Council, elected officials, and governmental agencies to implement policy, programmes and projects that tackle the issues that matter most to the transgender community in Los Angeles.

The TAC has delivered multiple trans-oriented cultural sensitivity trainings for city staff, and under the leadership of the City of Los Angeles’s sole LGBTQIA+ Liaison, Carla Ibarra, developed and finalised the L.A. City Workplace Transition Guidelines, which ensure that transgender and non-binary city employees can navigate transitioning in the workplace with dignity, clarity and care.

Until 2024, TAC received monthly updates on trans-specific hate crimes from the LGBTQIA+ community liaison at LAPD. The TAC also plans annual community resource fairs (focusing on housing and employment), and leads observances like Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR).

Cultural Norms

This chapter explores how GBV and harassment are normalised in Bogotá and how limited public trust and fragmented institutional responses have contributed to a culture of non-intervention. The chapter calls for a structural rethinking of approaches to culture change and highlights the potential of public campaigns, education, and artistic programming to reshape norms.

Insights

7. There is a normalisation of violence and harassment and an expectation of non-intervention in public space

Across our fieldwork, participants described a widespread culture of normalisation around GBV and harassment in Bogotá. Many women and girls described street harassment and unwanted attention as routine experiences. These behaviours were deeply embedded in everyday spaces such as neighbourhoods, schools, buses and workplaces. They impact women of all ages with participants aged between 12 to 83 reporting having experienced some form of gender based violence the week we met them.

Workshop participants felt that in Bogotá, it could not be expected that bystanders would intervene or keep you safe. GBV often goes unchallenged and is minimised or dismissed. Interventions by bystanders are rare in public spaces. As one participant noted during our workshops:

“Feeling safe has a key cultural aspect of caring for, and protecting, each other. Where I come from, we don’t have this, which means that I feel unsafe from the moment I leave my home.”

Municipal officials and participants felt that this was due to a “lack of civic culture” caused by the recent civil war and socio-economic divides across the city. These factors are reinforced by low institutional trust and the large share of people living in informal housing and neighbourhoods. Participants cited widespread fear and scepticism toward police, security staff and transport operators, who are often perceived as indifferent, dismissive or even complicit in public harassment. Some women had stopped reporting incidents altogether because of the emotional toll of recounting their experiences without eliciting a meaningful response. This is compounded by the fact that there is a lack of civic trust in Bogotá’s legal system. Laws on GBV place major burden of proofs on the victim, requiring women to navigate bureaucracies and invest emotional labour. SD Mujer officers have shared this concern, telling us that:

“Our legal system is inadequate to support the voices of women.”

In order to address this challenge, SD Mujer’s communication team has led workshops, training and capacity-building with transport workers to improve their understanding of the behavioural, gendered and spatial nature of harassment and support staff to identify and respond to harassment. There is a challenge to embed this training across large public-private partnerships for the new Metro Line 1 and ensuring buy-in from managerial staff and design teams as well as subcontracted workers. Staff often lack guidance on how to respond in real time. One of our participants shared with us that while the trainings are creating a noticeable drop in GBV, the difficulty of contacting on-site staff and workers meant that reporting inappropriate behaviours directly to Empresa Metro remained challenging.

There are significant opportunities to support front-line staff with ongoing capacity-building and scenario-based training, expanding youth education programmes, and creating public messaging that shifts responsibility from women to society at

large. If the city can sustain these efforts over time, it could begin to erode the widespread culture of indifference that currently enables harm.

8. There is a lack of joined-up investment in changing culture and behaviours

Although Bogotá has built considerable gender expertise, efforts to shift cultural norms remain fragmented, under-resourced and overly reliant on short-term campaigns. Officers we spoke to reported a lack of inter-departmental alignment, with each department running its own engagement or communications in silos. Without a unified strategy, campaigns are often inconsistent in message, tone or focus and are frequently reset with each political administration.

Despite this fragmentation, Bogotá's communications teams have piloted several creative interventions. These include *Un Machista Menos*, a public performance campaign challenging street chauvinism; *Cuidado, Pilas Ahí!*, a school-age initiative targeting gender violence in homes and neighbourhoods; and *Mujeres de Respuesta Azul*, an SD Mujer-led campaign deploying community safety officers across the transport system. These interventions reflect a growing shift away from punitive messaging. However, their reach remains limited without integrated, citywide implementation and long-term investment.

In our workshop with the city's communications team, officers noted that many campaigns still centre women as the primary agents of change and place the burden of prevention on those most affected, rather than addressing perpetrators. Officers also acknowledged the historically limited impact of campaigns. They've noted that campaigns often fail to reach outside of core government audiences and without long-term investment, their impact fades quickly. As one officer noted,

“Campaigns don't seem to have long-lasting impact. We call it a bubble effect.”

SD Mujer has a decade of experience campaigning but there is a desire to learn from international practices.

Participants in our workshop reflected that current campaigns often lean too heavily on reporting. These ask women to carry the burden rather than shifting responsibility toward institutional actors and the broader public. Others stressed the need for creative formats grounded in lived experience that generate solidarity and emotional connection. One officer noted:

“We have built narratives about prevention, but we need to do more to show how citizens can be part of the solution.”



Local Highlight

Launched in 2022 by Bogotá's *Secretaría de Educación* and over 30 partner institutions, *Pilas Ahí!* is a school-based campaign targeting sexual violence among children and adolescents aged 9 to 17. The initiative combines videos, booklets, and social media content to help young people recognise, name, and report abuse - particularly within their immediate circles, where most aggressors are found. It also equips teachers with tools for response and prevention, and connects students with support services through orientation areas in schools and the city's 123 helpline. Rather than focusing solely on awareness, *Pilas Ahí!* works to embed prevention and response into everyday learning environments.

There is also a need to evolve the visual and narrative language of campaigns. As shared in the workshop, international campaigns increasingly avoid portraying women solely as passive victims or men only as shadowy aggressors. Attention is also taken to avoid re-traumatising victims with graphic imagery and to ensure that any call for reporting is backed by responsive systems that support survivors. These lessons are particularly relevant in Bogotá where public trust in both the police and justice system is low and interventions must navigate a complex mix of fear, normalisation and disbelief.

Officers shared a strong desire to design future interventions that are emotionally resonant, systemic and participatory. One of the officers reflected that shifting away from security approaches to safety may be healing for the city:

“We must challenge our historical approach to safety through security and policy-making by creating ambitious sets of events and communication that invite people to reactivate shared and public urban space.”

During our campaign and messaging workshop, officers proposed campaigns using the metaphor of a freeze-frame game to explore the emotional paralysis of victims and bystanders in moments of violence. Another focused on the idea of spotlighting the aggressor and using social experiments to evoke solidarity around the phrase, “Be careful, she’s all of us.” A third proposed campaign would foster awareness and behavioural change in young people through games, audiovisual storytelling and long-term partnerships with schools and public media.

Many people suggested that cultural change should be encouraged through the activation and reclaiming of streets, led with cultural programming such as festivals, music or dance. One officer said:

“Bogotá, just as Mexico City, is a place where art is part of our daily lives and a community exercise. This to me is where we need to focus, and what we need to harness and celebrate. There are two barriers: the first is how do we create an institutional focus on programming, and the second is, how do we make citizens believe that this investment is needed in the first place?”

What emerged clearly was not a lack of ideas or capability but a need for cross-departmental coordination and political continuity. There is also a clear appetite to centre citizen co-creation and deepen the link between communications and training, ensuring that messaging is reinforced through real-world practice and shared learning. Sustained investment in behaviour change, public messaging and emotional learning is essential for embedding gender inclusion in public spaces.

Opportunities

1. Ensure public messaging campaigns are paired with long-term strategies to change behaviours

Although public information campaigns exist, these are often short-term and standalone. More could be done to ensure public campaigns have long-term impacts, align with city-wide strategic priorities and are paired with wider strategies to support the roll-out of bystander intervention training.
2. Embed GBV prevention into the design of public spaces and infrastructure

There is an opportunity to design visual, artistic and participatory interventions across Bogotá’s public spaces, from schools and parks to transit hubs. These might include street art campaigns, mobile exhibitions, education events, and interactive installations that challenge norms, celebrate care, and promote emotional connection. Such work could be co-produced with local artists, educators and grassroots organisations and highlight some of the feminist voices of the city.

3. Quantify and communicate the social and economic cost of GBV

To strengthen political will and secure long-term investment, Bogotá could commission a cross-sector study on the social and economic costs of machismo and GBV. This data should be made accessible and visible to support future public campaigns, policy advocacy and funding strategies.



Image: Paola de Grenet

Gender mobility study, Barcelona

Gender disaggregated data is any data that can be broken down according to gender. Data collected and tabulated separately across gender and age helps to better reflect the realities of the lived experience of each category, highlighting differences and inequalities. Barcelona collected gender disaggregated transport data showing the gendered differences in journey purposes and times. The data found that women primarily travelled for family reasons, followed by work, whereas men primarily travelled for work above all other reasons. Women made more short-distance, frequent trips within the city that were more encumbered, for example by travelling with children or prams. The data also showed that women used public transport more than men. By disaggregating the data, transport planners can better assess the impacts of investments and policies on gender equality, ensuring that decisions don't adversely impact journeys more likely to be made by women.



Image: City of Amsterdam

‘Stop When She Doesn’t Want To’, Amsterdam

In March and September 2023, the “Stop if she doesn’t want to” campaign ran throughout the city of Amsterdam. The campaign’s goal was to send a message to (potential) perpetrators of sexual misconduct: the responsibility for preventing sexual misconduct lies with you. Combined with research published on sexual violence, the campaign delivered a strong message on social media, in the streets and in newspapers. It generated nearly 100,000 impressions and 1,479 reactions on social media, including 187 comments. This demonstrates that the topic is alive and well and has been widely discussed. The campaign is part of a broader effort to combat (potential) perpetrators of sexual violence.

Case Studies



Image: Fearless Collective

Fearless Collective

Founded in 2012 by Indian artist Shilo Shiv Suleman, the Fearless Collective is an art-activism group that collaborates with communities across the Global South to create participatory public art addressing issues like gender-based violence, displacement, and identity. Through large-scale murals and storytelling, the collective transforms public spaces into sites of resistance and healing, amplifying the voices of marginalised groups and challenging oppressive narratives.

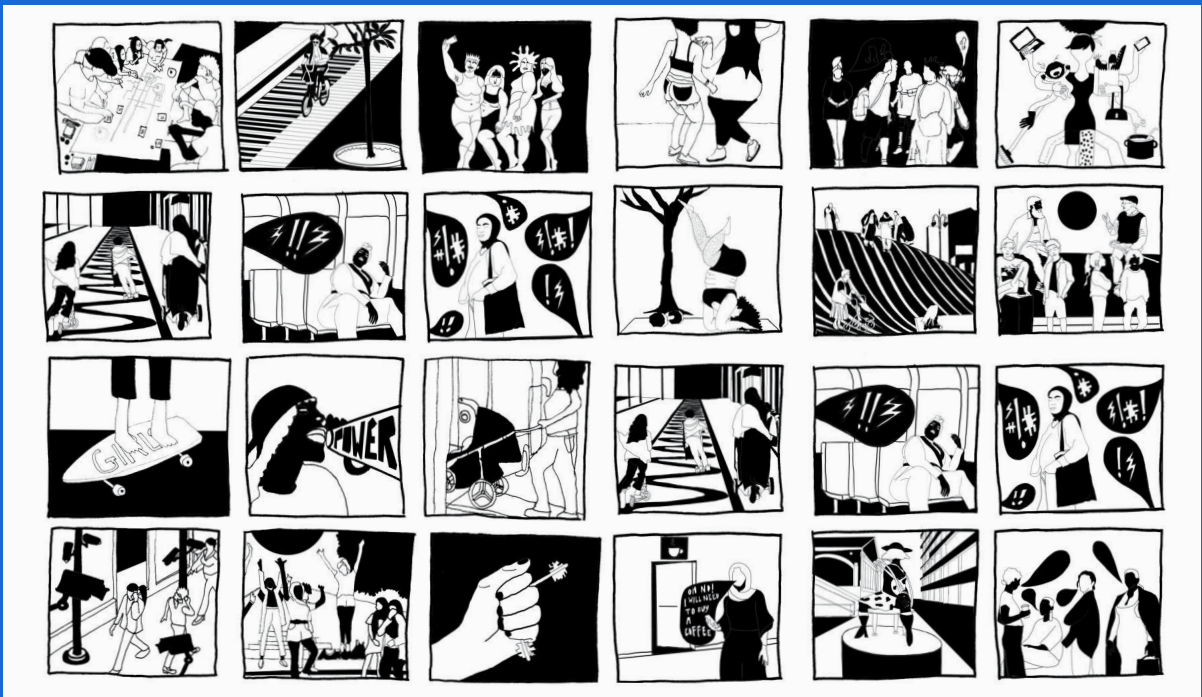
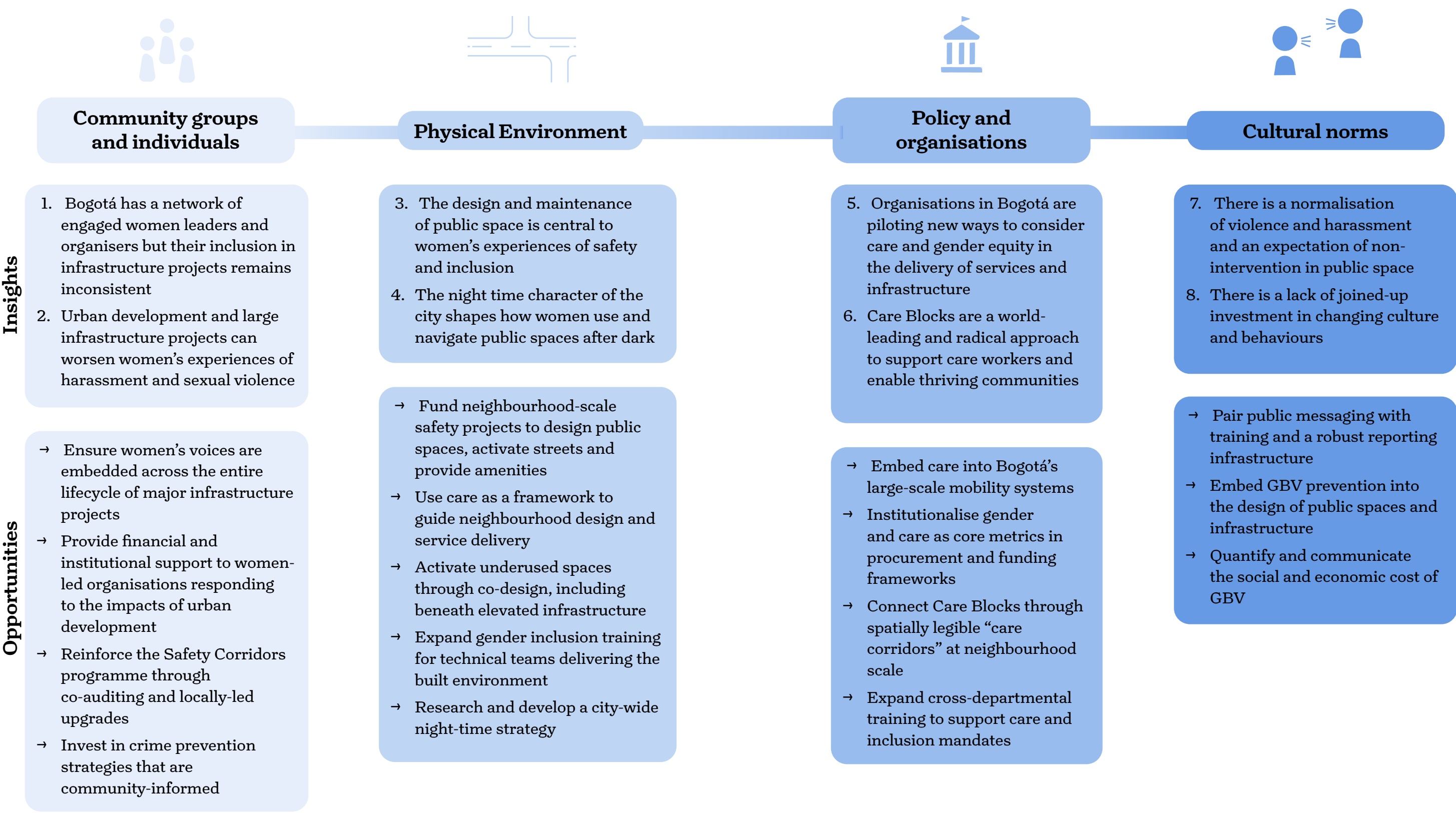


Image: Publica CIC

Right to the Street, Greater Manchester

Right to the Street was a year-long programme to create inclusive, active and safe streets and spaces in Trafford, Greater Manchester. The initiative was grounded in the belief that everyone has a role to play in making public spaces safe, joyful, and welcoming, which is an essential prerequisite for fostering healthy, happy, and active lives for all. Publica CIC was appointed to ensure the programme would be built on solid evidence. They acted as a “critical friend” to all project partners, facilitating a whole-system approach that brought together communities and cross-sector organisations to act at different scales. Publica created workshop and educational resources that allow people to connect to and express what they already know about how gender-based exclusion works in public spaces.

Summary of key findings and opportunities





Acknowledgements and thanks

Laura Tami
Ana María Buriticá
Ivonne Rico
Laura Camacho
Catalina Hernandez
Catalina Rodriguez
Sofia Sanchez
Lilibeth Xiquez
Jasson Ivan Pinillos
Juanita Barrera Duenas
Laura Catalina Roa
Alejandra Estrada
Kelly Rodgers

And all of the community members and leaders from Barrios Nuevos.

Louisville

Contents

122	Executive summary
124	Background and context
126	Methodology
128	What we did
130	Introduction to Louisville
136	Community Groups and Individuals
150	Physical Environment
168	Policy and Organisation
178	Cultural Norms
188	Summary of key findings and opportunities
192	Appendix 1: Smoketown workshop
206	Appendix 2: Russell workshop
218	Acknowledgements

Executive summary

There is an opportunity to radically rethink the way that safety in public space is considered, spoken about and built into public realm projects in Louisville. Safety is currently narrowly considered through the lenses of violent crime and traffic safety. What this report, and the fieldwork and research it is based on, reveals is that for many women, girls and non-binary people living in Louisville safety is as much about the sense of belonging, welcome and care they feel in their neighbourhoods and public spaces as it is about freedom from violence. Issues of affordable housing, displacement, lack of public seating, poor quality pedestrian infrastructure and inadequate maintenance of public spaces contribute to the sense that some parts of the city are uncared for and inaccessible and, by extension, unsafe. This is particularly exacerbated after dark, where some streets are unlit and many public spaces have little activity.

Ambitious new public art, play and pocket park programmes are providing improved amenities in neighbourhoods across the city. However, there are challenges in large new developments that often fail to improve the conditions of public spaces. There is an opportunity for the Office for Women, and the network of Office for Women Ambassadors across the city who are offered leadership training and mentoring, to more formally and consistently be involved in design projects and support direct and participatory engagement with women, girls and non-binary people to shape the planning, design, delivery and maintenance of public spaces.

The recommendations and opportunities outlined in this report call for a much broader understanding of safety as a foundational requirement for developing thriving neighbourhoods. It expands the set of tools and actions that the city can take and emphasises the need to do this in partnership with communities, recognising the ways in which people's identities intersect to create different lived experiences and safety needs. It also highlights the costs, both social and economic, of not investing in safe, accessible, usable and welcoming public spaces.

Background and context

About this report

This report summarises the first phase of Publica and CHANGE’s collaborative project “Designing Safety, Building Belonging: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Urban Spaces” which explores how design in the built environment can make cities safer, more usable and more welcoming to women, girls, gender diverse people and caregivers. The project draws on research findings from fieldwork to Louisville, Bogotá and Stockholm to understand how these cities are currently integrating gender inclusion principles into their policies and strategies to develop safe public spaces. This report documents the first of these site visits and explores the relationship between women’s safety and urban development processes in Louisville.

The report builds on fieldwork, engagement, quantitative and qualitative evidence and analysis to develop a set of public space and urban design interventions and policy recommendations that will directly address the most pressing challenges around women and girls’ safety in public spaces. The research is intended to support Metro Government officers in Louisville to take action and mainstream gender inclusion principles in the development of the city. It is also part of a wider set of resources to provide lessons and recommendations for partner cities within the CHANGE network wanting to explore gender-based violence in their own geographies, to be shared with the network and beyond.

About CHANGE

Founded in 2020, the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) is the world’s first international network led by cities and dedicated exclusively to the pursuit of gender equity. Made up of 17 cities across six continents, the network convenes topic-specific working groups and promotes knowledge exchange between cities to support the development of gender inclusive policies and programmes.

About Publica CIC

Publica Community Interest Company (CIC) is a London-based non-profit organisation offering policy guidance, resources, toolkits, workshops and training to advance public discourses and professional practices around designing inclusive cities. Publica CIC leads a campaign for inclusive cities and conducts research and advocacy to better integrate gender inclusive design principles and the experiences of women, girls and non-binary people into built environment projects and policies through the use of creative and participatory methods.

Methodology

Over the course of a week-long visit to Louisville, Publica organised three community engagement workshops and met with Metro Louisville council members, the city’s political leadership, council officers, partners and community groups. The purpose of the visit was to understand the challenges facing the city and identify opportunities for embedding gender-inclusive principles in urban development projects. Publica also facilitated and organised a training session with over 50 local planners, engineers, architects, urban designers and council members to share global best practices for designing gender inclusive public spaces.

The participatory workshops with local residents sought to understand the lived experiences and needs of women and girls locally. These explored perceptions of safety in different parts of the city and started to co-develop visions for a safer city. Publica facilitated participatory audits in two neighbourhoods to identify key issues and opportunities for public space investment. The audits used street tagging to invite workshop participants to ‘tag’ and photograph the features in the public realm that either positively contribute to them feeling safe or negatively detract from their sense of belonging.

The first of these workshops was held in Smoketown, which is a historically Black neighbourhood and a gateway to downtown. The second workshop was held in Russell in the West End of Louisville. The neighbourhoods are bookends of a major thoroughfare — Broadway — which will be the site of federally-funded investment through the “Broadway All the Way” project. These neighbourhoods represent two areas on each side of the 9th Street divide, a marker of racial segregation, which is also the site of future investment in the “Reimagining 9th Street” project.

The third and final workshop invited young women and teens to explore their safety experiences in public spaces. Hosted by La Casita Center, a community organisation that supports Latinx families and individuals, the workshop connected the participants with policy-makers to advocate for changes to their

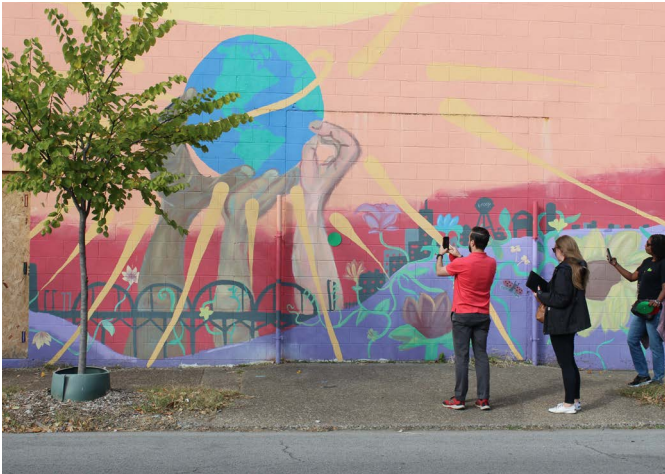
neighbourhoods. Working with the Parks Alliance, a non-profit leading the Parks for All equity initiative in Louisville, and with the Director of Parks and Recreation, the girls and young women were invited to form a long-term community steering group to oversee the redevelopment of G.G. Moore Park as a potential site for co-design by teen girls.

The visit was organised and led by the Office for Women. The office convened a wide range of local leaders, government workers and partners including the Mayor, Deputy Mayors, council members, community organisations and senior council workers to take part in the research. A working group of officers was also established to take the recommendations of this report forward. The week-long activities and workshops were also covered in the local media.

What we did



Listening to community groups and conducting fieldwork



Testing our methods and approaches in neighbourhoods



Presenting our work through local media channels



Training and upskilling built environment professionals



Facilitating engagement activities with young women and girls



Collating our findings and making recommendations



Visiting recent urban design projects and raising awareness of these



Meeting with city leaders to understand their priorities, concerns and raise the profile of this work



Supporting co-design projects in parks and bringing young women and girls' voices into projects

Introduction to Louisville

City snapshot

Population: 622,981

Density: 914 residents per km²

Poverty rate: 16.1% generally but 17.7% for women with 8.5% of women living at 50% below the poverty rate. 32.3% of single-parent female-headed households are in poverty.

Racial diversity: American Indian and Native Alaskan - 0.1%, Asian - 2.7%, Black or African American - 23.9%, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders - 0.1%, Any other race - 2.7%, Mixed or multiple - 6.1%, white - 65.4%

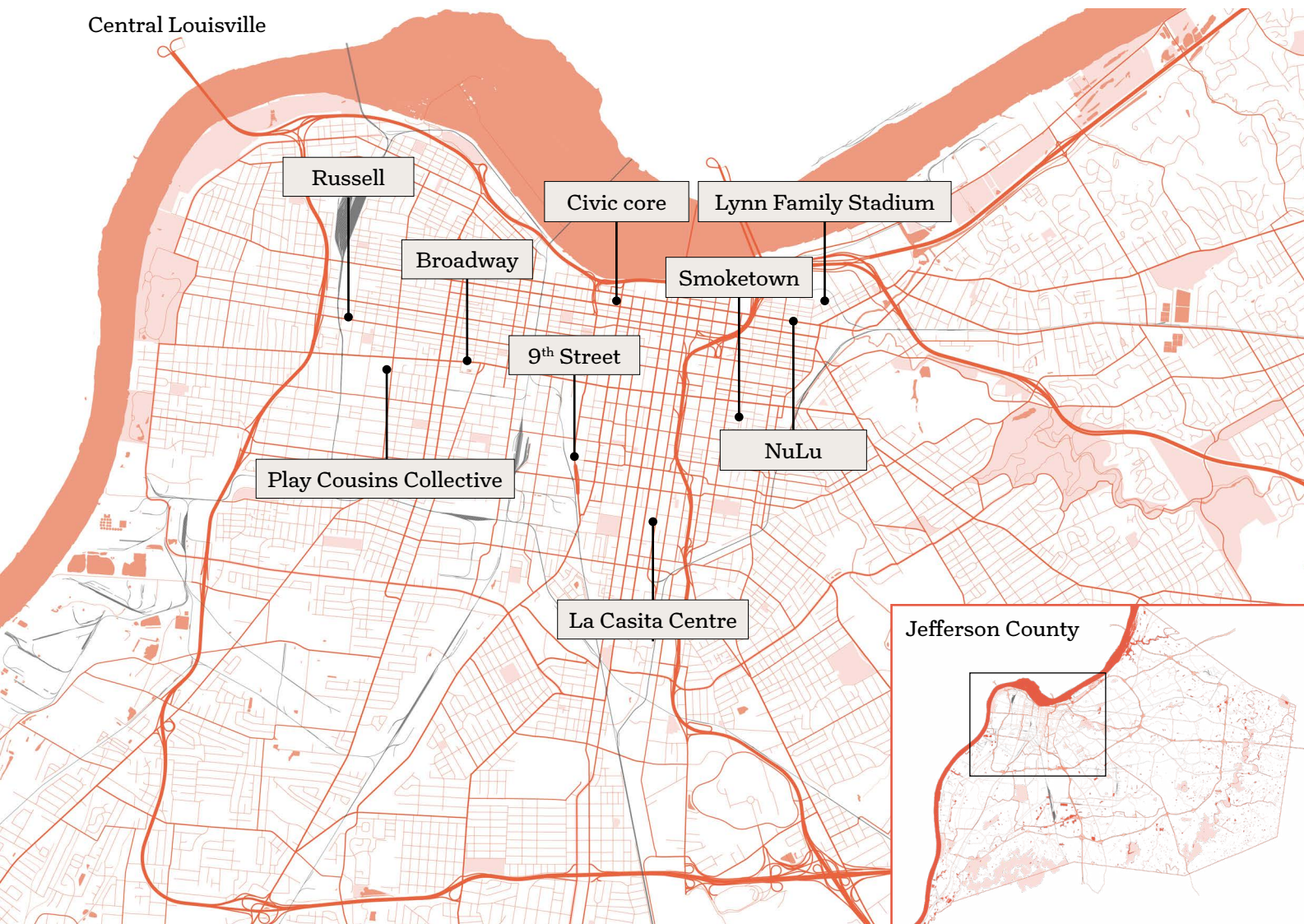
Ethnic diversity: 6.8% Hispanic or Latino

Median household income: \$61,488

Homeownership: 60%

Housing type: 67.6% of households live in single unit housing

Female representation on city council: 10/26 – 38%



Themes

Gun violence

Gun violence is an epidemic in America. According to the advocacy group, Everytown for Gun Safety, 125 people in the United States are killed with guns each day, and more than 200 are shot and wounded. This violence is not evenly distributed across American society; it reflects and exacerbates existing inequalities with Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people experiencing higher rates of gun homicides and increased risks of being fatally shot by the police than white people. Gun violence is gendered as well as racialised, with domestic violence gun homicides disproportionately impacting women, particularly Black and Indigenous women. In Louisville, gun violence is the fourth leading cause of death among Black residents, whereas the fourth leading cause of death for white residents is lung disease. Across America, Black people are 12 times more likely to die by gun homicide than white people. The prevalence of gun violence, and the perception of risk, which has increased since the relaxing of gun controls in Kentucky, erodes a sense of civic life in public spaces.

Intersections of gender and race

Racism is experienced differently by Black men and Black women. Likewise, sexism affects white women and Black women in different ways. The phenomenon of intersectionality is well-documented in almost every indicator, from yearly earnings to health outcomes. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2022, Black women earned 70 cents for every dollar earned by white men, compared to white women earning 83 cents. In 2021, the maternal mortality rate for Black women was more than twice that of white women. Black women are often oversexualized, and at younger ages than white women, building on stereotypes that date back to slavery. Intersections of sexism and racism have historically made the feminist project in America more complex. As Nikole Hannah-Jones has written, the feminist project has largely been by and for white women, even though major movements in the 20th century had their

roots in Black civil rights campaigns. Earlier in the 20th century, the (often untrue) word of white women were used to justify lynchings of Black men, the threat of racialised sexual violence used toward a racially motivated violent end. The history, and perception, of feminist progress is therefore deeply intertwined with the painful history of racial exploitation and violence in America. In this context, it's vital to clearly state that a feminist city is also an antiracist one.

Severance, segregation and disinvestment: the impact of highways, redlining, and zoning

As is true of many American cities, the streets, spaces, and neighbourhoods of Louisville bear the mark of 20th century racially discriminatory urban development practices. In Louisville, three of the most impactful of these practices were highways, redlining and zoning. Each of them has impacted the city's public realm—the streets and spaces between buildings, which should be civic commons that are safe and welcoming to all.

Central Louisville is divided by highways and rail infrastructure. Two of the biggest destinations in the city, the Big Four Bridge and the Lynn Family Stadium, are both in the shadow of the I-64 and I-65 interchange; the latter separates NuLu from Downtown and the former separates Downtown from the riverfront. 9th Street, a six-lane arterial road that runs north-to-south and connects Broadway to I-64, divides the predominantly Black neighbourhood of Russell from Downtown. To build it, in the 1950s and 60s, the local government demolished a thriving Black businesses district, leaving physical and psychological marks on the residential community. Car-centric infrastructure has a greater and more adverse effect on Black people, who are killed in traffic crashes at higher rates than the national average and are more likely to be killed as pedestrians. Reimagine Ninth Street seeks to remedy this historic harm and re-establish connections across the road and rebalance roadway space for cyclists and pedestrians.

Redlining is the common name for the “Residential Security” rating system developed by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) in the 1930s, which they used to inform their lending. The HOLC applied a 4-tier rating system to neighbourhoods across American cities and created maps to indicate the desirability for investment. Recent academic analysis has shown that, across the country, Black neighbourhoods were given the lower grades of ‘declining’ and ‘hazardous,’ making it much more difficult for people who lived or were purchasing houses in these communities to access credit. This economic injustice has paved the way for continued disinvestment throughout the latter half of the 20th century.

Zoning, the bedrock of the American planning system, controls the use, bulk, and density of buildings in certain areas of land. Originally intended to protect residential areas from toxic and harmful industrial uses, zoning has resulted in single-use neighbourhoods which compel car use. Moreover, zoning has inscribed a lack of density into American residential areas. So-called R-1 districts require that buildings be single family houses on a lot at least an acre in size, a degree of density that also compels car use to cover the large distances between one's home and the local grocery store, which, because of zoning, must be located outside of an R-1 district.

The cumulative effect of nearly a century of discriminatory urban development practices can be seen in Louisville today, but, thanks to the work of activist and community groups, there is increasing attention on addressing these historic wrongs and redirecting investment to the communities that were most impacted by the previous generation of urban infrastructure.



Community Groups and Individuals

This chapter draws attention to the lived experiences and expertise of women, girls and gender diverse people in Louisville and makes the case for more systematically seeking out their experiences, transferring power to them and investing in their ability to organise.

Existing assets

Louisville is home to a range of strong, organised, active and ambitious community groups and philanthropic organisations that are already re-shaping the city to meet their needs. From tree planting to address shade inequity and community murals to celebrate local histories to ambitious new Community Land Trusts, women-owned business walks and new parks, grassroots organisers are mapping inequalities, researching their neighbourhoods, telling their local stories and delivering new infrastructure and amenities. These organisations and movements represent a thriving and ambitious community that will be at the forefront of any initiative to address gender-based violence in public spaces.



Case Study

Russell: A Place of Promise (RPOP) was founded six years ago in 2018 as a social enterprise and non-profit incubated within Louisville Metro Council to promote and deliver Black Wealth Building in Russell. They have partnered with organisations such as Play Cousins Collective, a Black family collective and non-profit, to deliver business and

housing support, develop local leadership, develop arts and story-telling projects, preserve local histories and ensure neighbourhood improvements are delivered with and for the local Black population. The organisation is developing the city's first Community Land Trust (CLT) on a plot of surplus city-owned land on the corner of 30th and Madison Street. The land was sold to RPOP for \$1 and the model of a CLT allows the value of the project to be captured by the community and supports the delivery of affordable housing in perpetuity. The CLT will allow people to build wealth and equity in their communities without the threat of displacement.

Insights

1. A sense of safety stems from visible community activity, care and belonging in Louisville

When describing places that felt safe, people in each workshop described places where they could see other people like them. Being alone in public space was described as an uncomfortable feeling and seeing others signalled that a space is for people like them. People reflected on the importance of neighbourliness and the informal care people show towards one another. The act of speaking to people on their front porches, as they drove by or from a parked car, was described as a small signal that there are eyes on the street and that people are nearby if anything were to happen. The types of spaces people wanted to see were fundamentally social places where people could meet, gather and dwell. This was framed by a workshop participant as:

“Safety in public is about having your everyday needs met and having a system that cares for and supports you. It also helps to see other women and children around and services for them in public to say this space is for someone like me”.

In some cases, community resources and care were seen as effective alternatives to police-led interventions. Community-led approaches were seen as more preventative and proactive than the reactive criminal justice systems. In one instance during the street tagging exercise in Russell, a participant stopped and spoke to a Violence Interrupter from the Office of Safe and Healthy Neighbourhoods. They reflected that this interaction lacked the inherent power imbalances present when speaking to the police. The threat of violence was low, the outreach worker was embedded in the community and there were no symbols or uniforms to signal power imbalances. The male Violence Interrupter was instead seen as caring for his community, promoting a strong and positive form of masculinity. These

types of community-led safety strategies were seen as effective interventions to improve safety.

Other interventions, such as murals and public art, allowed people to see someone like themselves being celebrated in public spaces. The mural in Smoketown by Liz Richter of a breastfeeding Black mother was brought up in one of the workshops as a moving depiction of care celebrating the role Black women play in the neighbourhood. The mural is a celebration of the local community with a line from the Kentucky-born poet Wendell Berry painted alongside the mural saying simply “What we need is here.” These messages, prominently displayed in public, play an important safety role for many women, girls and gender diverse people.

There are also examples of business-led approaches to improving safety. Women-Owned Wallet is a feminist gift shop in the NuLu district of Louisville. The owner of the business, with the support of Racing Louisville — the local women’s soccer team and Louisville’s only professional sports team — developed a map and tour of local women-owned businesses. Connecting these businesses to one another and highlighting the prominent role of women-owned businesses in the area was framed as another way to improve safety in the area by strengthening informal networks and ties between business owners that provide everyday stewardship of the street.

Many of the community-led approaches to safety people wanted to see, from street art and murals to community gardens and playspaces, speak to the role of care, both for people and the care we have for the built environment. Where vacant lots, industrial yards, abandoned buildings and closed businesses signal a lack of care and investment in a neighbourhood, small-scale interventions such as murals that celebrate local communities and heritage, community libraries and businesses with outdoor seating and spill-out spaces spoke to the fact that a community lives here, is celebrated and has a long history in this place. This model goes against widely held understandings of safety as individualised and something people can secure through their

behaviours and choices. Safety is instead recast as something that is communally developed as a collective responsibility. It extends the range of interventions and tools we can invest in to promote safety and reframes issues such as secure and affordable housing, access to green space and shade, walkable and healthy neighbourhoods as safety considerations.

2. Women and girls have different safety needs depending on intersecting identities such as age, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status

To understand the safety experiences, needs and realities of women in public spaces - and the design features that contribute to them - it is essential to engage directly with a diversity of women. These diverse groups of women will have different experiences and needs and designers need to be aware of, and design with, the tension that this presents.

In Louisville, we noted these differences through street tagging exercises. Where new housing signalled investment to one group, they were a reminder of evictions, forced displacement and uprooted communities for another. When teenage girls spoke of spending their free time on Bardstown Road, older women countered that they would never spend time on that street. Familiarity with a place, and a sense of connection to the people that live and work in that place, significantly shape people's safety experiences. In many cases, these signals of belonging, familiarity and a sense of welcome are the strongest signals that a space is safe.

Racial inequalities and marginalisation were raised regularly during community workshops and meetings with city officials. One way this manifests is in a distrust of policing in Black communities. During the street tagging exercise in Russell, participants raised how the police are not always seen as a safety resource for Black people, and rather can be experienced as a threat. One participant described how she would "not call the police unless my life was in immediate danger as I might end up shot or so might the person I called them on."

Safety experiences may be different for white women and Black women, women of colour and transgender women. Historically, there have been tensions about reporting to police. A community member framed this as:

“When we’re dealing with gender violence, we have to remember there is a history of white women accusing Black men of assault.”

Stories and incidences of violence, and particularly gun violence, in public spaces in Louisville shape people's daily lives and the decisions they make about where to go, when to leave, and how to travel. This insight was particularly pertinent when speaking with school-aged young women who are confronted with restrictions and checks in relation to gun violence on a daily basis through their school safety protocols. These daily routines act as reminders of the city's recent history of gun violence and significantly impact people's sense of safety and comfort in public spaces.

Other narratives, such as those of gentrification, displacement and disinvestment, shape people's long-term view of safety. As one woman in Russell put it:

“Safety for me exists over a twenty-year span: will the community still be here? Will my children have access to these spaces? Will I recognise the neighbourhood and be welcomed here? Will our homes be passed down to our children?”

Safety for many people, particularly in Russell, is about being safe in the knowledge that they will recognise and be welcomed in their neighbourhoods in the future and that their children will have access to property and wealth in the places where they grew up.

Many young people described having nowhere to gather without having to spend money, and that they feel exploited. They shared that if they decide to hang out in their cars, they are subject to suspicion by police and told to move on. Any discussion of designing for safety must therefore ask who the space is being designed for and the vulnerabilities and exclusions that might be exacerbated through design approaches.

These tensions, where safety for one person may signal insecurity for another, mean that an intentional and considered approach to designing spaces for the safety of women, girls and gender diverse people must include significant time speaking to as wide and diverse a cross-section of these groups in the places that are being designed. Engagement with these groups should ask people about how they feel in places, unpick what it is that makes them feel this way and afford them decision-making power. Women, girls and gender diverse people are experts in their lives and their neighbourhoods. Community members should be compensated for their time and insights, credited for their input and should hold power to shape decisions about their communities.



Members of RPOP shared their plans for new affordable housing delivered by a Community Land Trust on the corner of 30th and Madison Street



Violence Interrupter from the Office of Safe and Healthy Neighbourhoods in Russell

Opportunities

1. Implement a programme of community engagement to inform neighbourhood safety and management systems

Develop neighbourhood-level safety programmes and interventions, such as night time safety walks, better wayfinding and signage. Plan specific engagement with women, girls and gender diverse people in public realm and development proposals. Use experimental engagement methods in-situ and put gender on the agenda of design meetings. Capture and document engagement with women, girls and gender diverse people and share reflections and findings from this pilot with other departments and teams to mainstream these approaches.

2. Deliver active bystander training

Deliver active bystander or bystander intervention training through community groups, business alliances, business improvement districts and other networks of businesses to support people to identify sexual harassment and safely intervene and support victims. Develop an accreditation scheme to showcase businesses that have had their staff trained to be active bystanders.

3. Celebrate women’s stories in public space through murals, signage, statues and memorials

Continue to invest in murals, public art and interventions in public spaces that celebrate and tell women’s histories and stories. Use Alberta O. Jones Park as a model for how to do this and explore opportunities for new murals and public art in large public realm schemes. Explore opportunities to illuminate these at night and co-design artwork with women, girls and gender diverse people where possible.

4. Invest in women-led local businesses and events

Develop grants for community events and interventions that support the safety of women, girls and gender diverse people. Promote family-friendly events and use events to reclaim spaces that feel unsafe such as green spaces or vacant lots.

Case Studies



Image: City of Melbourne

Melbourne Women Who Walk

In 2019, local organisation Victoria Walks partnered with the City of Melbourne to deliver a series of social evening walks for women at Princes Park in Carlton. The free events took place on Tuesday nights over seven weeks from late October to December. They were aimed at women living or working in the City of Melbourne. The walks encouraged the groups to come together in community and discuss how green spaces can be more accessible and welcoming for female residents. The programme succeeded in attracting women of all ages and fitness levels to make better use of the park. Participants provided positive feedback with many people encouraging the city to replicate the event in other parks around the city.

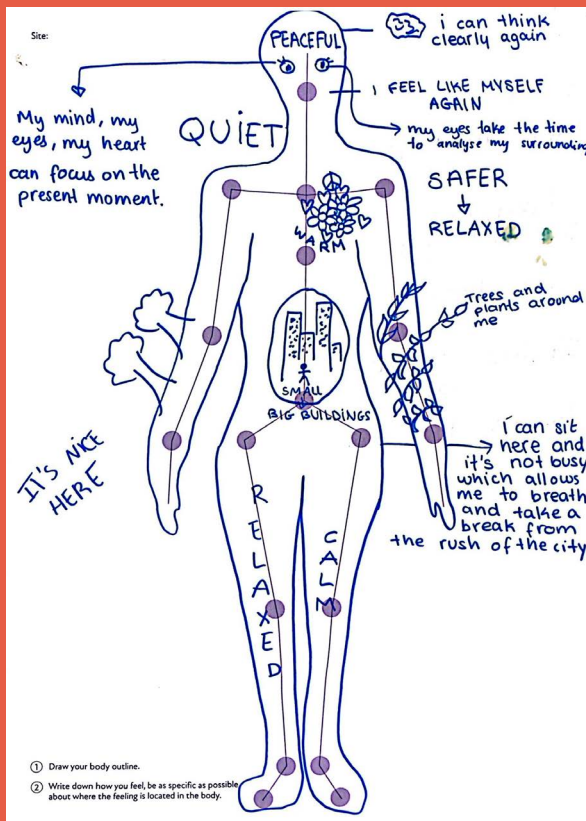
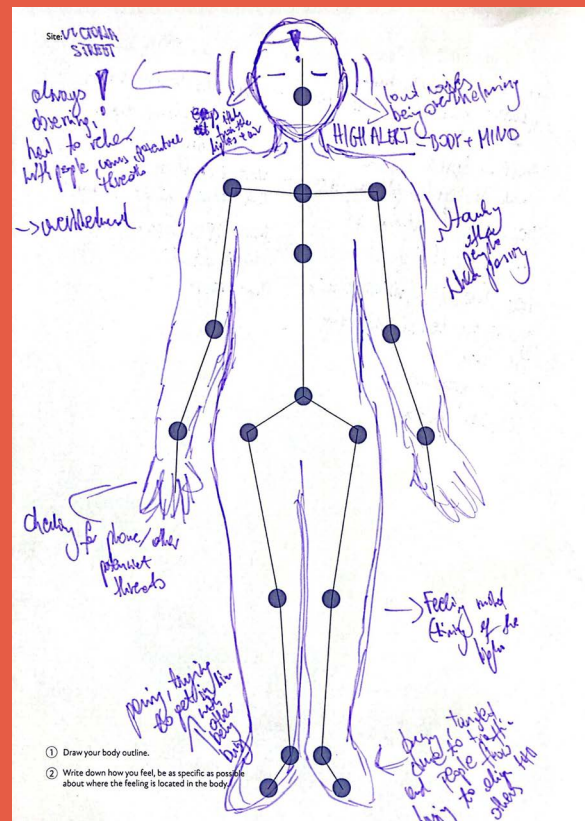


Image: Publica



Body Mapping

Body mapping is a participatory research method that recognises the body as the site of gender-based violence. It acknowledges and draws on the fact that the experiences of safety, or the inverse experiences of danger and discomfort in public spaces, are felt and embodied as emotions, sensations, behaviours and feelings such as shortness of breath, anxiety, elevated heart rates or clenched fists for example. The method supports participants to communicate emotions that may be difficult to verbalise and provides visual representations of how people feel and subjectively experience a space. The method invites participants to draw their feelings and experiences onto an outline that represents their bodies and discuss these with researchers.



Image: Taipei City

Taipei City Sexual Harassment Prevention Hotline

Since July 2023, Taipei City has partnered with the Modern Women's Foundation to operate a Sexual Harassment Prevention Hotline offering integrated support under Taiwan's three key sexual harassment laws. From January to December 2024, the hotline received 606 calls. The majority (41.7%) involved questions about legal procedures and complaint processes, and 91.3% of callers said they received sufficient information. Services include psychological counselling, legal consultation and casework support such as social worker accompaniment. The hotline is part of a broader public education campaign: in 2024, Taipei hosted eight training sessions, produced educational materials and distributed awareness merchandise (e.g., badges, fans, posters) to promote victim support and clarify complaint mechanisms in public spaces and workplace settings.



Image: City of Bogotá

Care Blocks

The city of Bogotá in Colombia launched the District Care System in 2020 to deliver a distributed network of city Care Blocks. Designed to be accessible within a 15 to 20-minute walk from most households, the current network of 20 Care Blocks co-locates care facilities, for children and older adults for example, with educational, skills and recreational facilities to support primary caregivers, most of whom are women, to access services and support. More than 400,000 women and families have benefited from Care Blocks. Men and boys can also benefit by attending classes as part of the Care School for Men, which teaches men how to cook, clean and care for their children.

Physical Environment

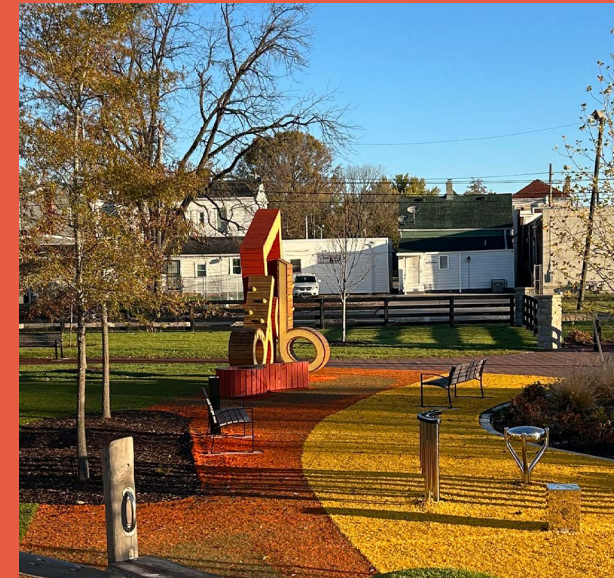
This chapter explores the alternative visions for the city that people expressed and suggests new models of development to achieve these visions. It stresses the importance of investing in neighbourhoods with the consent of communities and challenging processes of gentrification and displacement.

Existing assets

The city has secured significant funding for large and ambitious streetscape projects along Broadway (Broadway All the Way) and 9th Street (Reimagine 9th Street). These projects are specifically designed to address equity issues and to reduce the severance caused by these main arterial routes. Other opportunities exist in the Butchertown district surrounding the Lynn Family Stadium to extend higher-density downtown uses.

The city is also in the process of updating land development and zoning codes and has recently undertaken an extensive piece of research to understand the ways in which the current zoning regime has enforced and exacerbated racial disparities and inequities. Recent legislation has also made it incumbent on developers to assess the potential risk of development projects to create displacement.

These strands of work provide unique opportunities to develop demonstrator projects to showcase best practices and reshape some of the underlying policies and regulations that have created under-resourced, poorly connected and isolated neighbourhoods where residents are at risk of displacement.



Case Study

Alberta O. Jones Park is a new park and playground being delivered by the Parks Alliance in the California Neighborhood in West Louisville. Set across 20 acres of vacant land, the new park is located on the site of seven former city blocks that flooded in 2009 and had been cleared as a flood risk mitigation measure. Local residents formed

a leadership committee to steer the development of the project and organised pop-up engagement events to gather ideas for the playground design, theme and park name. The park is named after Alberta O. Jones, a civil rights activist and lawyer born in 1930. She was one of the first Black women to pass the Kentucky Bar exam and opened her practice near the park. In 1965, she became the first woman appointed a city attorney in Jefferson County, working as a prosecutor in the Louisville Domestic Relations Court to convict perpetrators of domestic violence.

Insights

3. Many streets are designed with vehicular movement as the primary consideration

The street tagging exercises revealed the extent to which many streets in the city are designed as places to move through, often in a vehicle and at speed, rather than as a place to dwell and socialise. Streets were seen as hostile to pedestrians and difficult to navigate, particularly at night. This was true of all types of streets, from residential roads to arterial routes. Built environment professionals were interested in the idea of setting Healthy Streets principles, as in London, to rebalance the distribution of space for different users of a street, and to understand the broader social, health and economic impacts of streetscapes. This approach would add further hierarchy to streets, reduce the volume and speed of traffic on residential streets and create safer streets for cyclists, pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. It recognises the various functions streets must play to meet a wider variety of needs.

This focus on movement through neighbourhoods extends to cycling and pedestrian infrastructure with very few bicycle parking locations or benches located in the surveyed residential neighbourhoods. The lack of benches extended to play spaces and reduced the accessibility of the public realm and people's ability to dwell. One workshop participant in Smoketown noted that:

“The lack of pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure signals that this neighbourhood is a thoroughfare for people to commute through to get to somewhere else and not somewhere to stay”.

The reliance on private modes of transport stems from limited local bus services and serves to further undermine public forms of transport. The segregation of land uses means low-density residential neighbourhoods can be far away from everyday

amenities and conveniences, further entrenching the use of private vehicles and discouraging walking and cycling. Poor infrastructure, such as narrow, poorly maintained and limited sidewalks, also reduces the walkability of neighbourhoods.

Another challenge is the continued stigmatisation of the use of public transport and the poor user experience, with bus stops and stands highlighted as spaces that could be improved to create a valued piece of public infrastructure.

This lack of public transport creates barriers for people to access services and amenities, particularly in neighbourhoods with low car ownership such as Russell or California where 9% and 12% of people over 16 live in a household without access to a car respectively (2023 Census). The poor public transport connectivity was cited as a barrier for women to access domestic violence services downtown for example, meaning that women experiencing domestic violence are often left isolated and with little support, even where services might otherwise be available. This is one of the ways in which investment in public transport can support gender equity and other policy goals.

4. There are principles of good urban design that should be non-negotiable and standard in new developments, but market forces make these difficult to secure

There are tensions in commercially-led developments between designing safe and walkable spaces and maximising returns on investments. There is a need to set higher design standards in the private sector, engage with developers on the opportunities of designing gender inclusive environments, and make a stronger business case for high-quality public spaces, active ground floors, generous pavements and mixed-use places by emphasising that these places attract increased footfall and future-proof investments. Local market conditions can make it difficult for the Metro government to negotiate for these considerations to be included in proposals and require these investments from the private sector.

Across the two street tagging workshops, participants consistently demanded higher quality new developments and stronger commitments from developers to address environmental challenges. Basic amenities such as pavements and street lighting were described as foundational for people's sense of safety and act as an invitation to use spaces during the day and night. Key principles of gender inclusive urban design, such as the arrangement of sites to provide long sight lines, the avoidance of overly dense and obstructive planting, the inclusion of public realm lighting and seating and the delivery of facilities such as public restrooms, should be considered in all built environment projects. However, these features are not consistently secured through the planning process. As one local government worker stated:

“Developers looking to minimise costs seek waivers to exempt them from providing sidewalks and threaten to pull-out of investing in the city if their demands are not met. Louisville has not historically been in a position to deny capital”.

Building codes should more strongly embed and outline the minimum expectations for public realm design and practical guidance should make it easier for developers to meet these standards. There is an opportunity to develop area strategies and consider issues of safety at a wider neighbourhood scale to avoid developing 'islands of safety' where a new development provides public realm that feels safe but surrounding areas continue to feel unsafe.

There is an opportunity in Butchertown around the new Lynn Family Stadium where new development and investments are concentrated, to embed these principles of good urban design and create an exemplary project for designing with women's safety in mind. Zoning overlays and codes are supportive of denser, more walkable development and there was enthusiasm

from the football team management and local businesses at the prospect of better linking NuLu to the new stadium and emerging district to ensure safe walking routes for fans.

At the city scale, the land development code is also being reviewed. This review has been supported by a detailed study of the existing code through the lens of racial equity. The Louisville Metro Office of Planning & Design Services has already established a strong research foundation looking at understanding the nature of racial inequities through planning and design, which is well communicated and accessible online. The research explores the history of segregation and the discriminatory outcomes land use zoning has inscribed on the landscape resulting in 45% of Louisville residents living in extreme racial segregation (2013). As part of this review of the code, there is an opportunity to conduct a similar study through a gender lens. Such a study could explore the location and accessibility of caring facilities and infrastructure for example and start to identify how the built environment contributes to gender inequities.

The two street tagging workshops highlighted the fact that the exercise would feel very different at night and there was strong enthusiasm from Metro Council officers to consider the city at night more consistently. This includes developing lighting strategies and considering the role night time businesses can play in stewarding, lighting and managing public spaces at night.

Active ground floor uses and mixed-use developments can create spaces that feel safer at night by providing passive surveillance and spill-out lighting from commercial premises. This commercial lighting is particularly important within a context where the maintenance and operational costs of public lighting were identified as barriers to the delivery and maintenance of this infrastructure by the municipal government.

5. Development needs to happen in partnership with communities

There is a legacy of urban planning and design processes disproportionately negatively impacting Black and racialised communities in Louisville. Participants in one of the workshops voiced a strong feeling that urban change has been “done to” communities rather than “done with” them. Zoning and planning policies have explicitly sought to segregate, devalue and destabilise majority-Black neighbourhoods.

More recent programmes of urban renewal, such as HOPE VI, have displaced communities and prevented Black communities from building equity and wealth. During the workshop in Smoketown, a local resident and artist that grew up in the Shepherd Square projects reflected on the impacts of the HOPE VI-funded neighbourhood revitalisation of the area. The project was the third to receive federal funding in Louisville and saw all 326 affordable housing units demolished in 2011 and replaced with 255 lower density, mixed-tenure housing. She reflected that many of the people she grew up with had been displaced and unable to find permanent housing, with some still in precarious housing situations over a decade later. She still feels safe in the neighbourhood but has mixed emotions when she sees the new higher quality development occupied by wealthier residents. There is a strong sense that incoming investment into majority Black neighbourhoods comes with an implicit expectation of a return on investment and the threat of displacement. As one participant in Russell put it:

“Investment comes with expectation of ownership, colonialism, extraction, gentrification and a removal of our culture and way of life. We give up something of ourselves”.

Some participants expressed feeling exploited and that their homes and communities are seen as a means to extract wealth out of their neighbourhoods. Urban planning projects

and practices need to actively acknowledge this history and work with communities to undo these legacies and mitigate risks of displacement. Russell Place of Promise specifically uses the language of Black Wealth Building and is using the tool of Community Land Trusts to build and secure this wealth for future generations. This is particularly important in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of renters such as Russell where 68% of people aged 16 and older live in rented accommodation. Lower levels of home ownership put these neighbourhoods at risk of gentrification and it is fundamental that any development in these neighbourhoods is done with a community’s consent.

The recent delivery of Alberta O. Jones Park sets a precedent for how urban development can support community ambitions. The establishment of a community board ensured that the philanthropic investment from organisations such as the Parks Alliance of Louisville was directed towards meeting specific community needs. The involvement of local people in the design and management of the park, including the temporary hiring of a local resident to provide an official maintenance and informal security presence on-site, sets a model for community engagement through the design, building and management of public space. The early engagement with teenage girls for the upgrade to G.G. Moore Park at La Casita Center further highlighted the passion young people have to be involved in the development of their community. There are opportunities to deploy these engagement, co-design and management approaches at scale across other public realm projects in the city.

These processes of sustained community engagement and power-sharing are vital in a context where public improvements may be philanthropically funded, and therefore less accountable to the needs and desires of local people. Communities need to be invested in on their own terms to ensure new investments do not destabilise existing ecosystems or businesses, such as women-owned childcare providers for example.

There is an opportunity to develop a principle-led approach to urban design projects that focuses on quality of life, centres the lived experiences of users of the space and develops innovative methods and processes that empower local people. Tools such as youth advisory boards, co-clienting, co-design, citizens’ assemblies and peer outreach workers were all mentioned as avenues for greater deliberation, power sharing and consensus-building. Balancing power across a project to share decision-making power with those affected by built environment decisions is a fundamental principle of equitable planning. Lower levels of home ownership put these neighbourhoods at risk of gentrification and it is particularly important that any development is done with a community’s consent.



Amenities such as playgrounds were strongly valued in residential communities. However, some people noted the lack of seating as a barrier to the use and enjoyment of the space



Traffic calming measures, new street murals and a pocket park and public space in Parkland

Opportunities

1. Give women and other community representatives a seat at the table and decision making power about their own neighbourhoods

Establish deliberative engagement groups, such as citizens' assemblies or youth/community advisory boards, to facilitate long-term community input into large strategic projects.

Establish community and youth boards for all large park and public realm projects. Systematically map power for public realm projects, identifying who has power in the project and how this shifts over time. Design project governance systems to share power with women, girls and gender diverse people through community review panels, community steering groups and other co-design tools.

2. Co-design public spaces with local women, girls and gender diverse people

Work with employees in large employment hubs, such as the LouMed district, to identify places that feel unsafe. Co-design and implement interventions for these places that draw on the specific findings of the engagement.

3. Contract Office for Women Ambassadors as experts in public space redevelopment projects

Invite Office for Women Ambassadors to sit on project boards and attend key meetings concerning upcoming major projects and developments.

4. Upskill the urban development sector with training and guidance on gender inclusive design principles

Develop clear guidance for developers outlining gender-inclusive urban design principles in public space. Compile best practice case studies and simple recommendations and use this guide when engaging with developers.

5. Include gender inclusion in the development code

Embed these gender inclusion principles in the development code when it is re-written and allow for more mixed uses to support the delivery of amenities and services, such as grocery shops and daycares, in residential neighbourhoods.

6. Develop a night time strategy

Conduct a study into the city's economy at night to identify character areas, night time employment clusters and potential areas for additional night time activities. Explore opportunities to create more social, family-friendly and inclusive night time spaces to encourage a wider range of people to be active at night and create safer and more welcoming public spaces after dark.

Case Studies

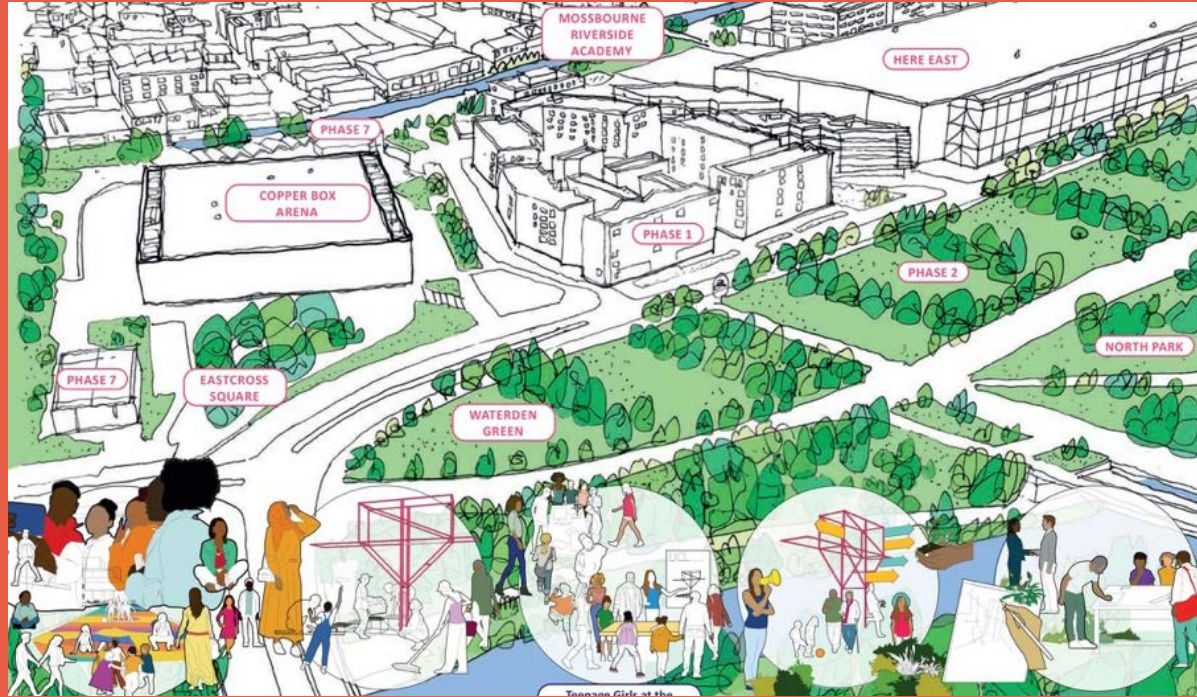


Image: Studio Gil

Waterden Green

Waterden Green is a new outdoor public space for teenagers within the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London. The London Legacy Development Corporation is the landowner of the site and, alongside the real estate developer for the wider masterplan, has partnered with a group of local young women to act as co-clients for the development of the open space. To effectively share power, the young women received training to understand the design and development process. They wrote the architectural brief, selected the design team, which includes Studio Gil, Black Females in Architecture, Untitled Practice, Simple Works and Light Follows Behaviour. The young women and girls have been developing the space as clients for their own projects, setting milestones, leading design review meetings and ensuring their vision is delivered by the design team.



Image: Landskapslaget

Co-designed shelter with women and girls, Stockholm

Planning and transport officers in Stockholm have worked closely with the municipal landscape design team, community safety officers and landscape architects Landskapslaget to co-design and activate a piece of poorly defined open green space in the Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby. The landscape designers opened a pop-up office called *Gäris* (Swedish slang for Girls) in Rinkeby to work closely with women and girls from the area to design a pavilion and shelter structure for the park following extensive engagement. Engagement activities included safety walks and collage-making with girls to explore what the city would look like if it was built by girls. The women and girls expressed their desire for a space that could be theirs. Mothers and older children wanted somewhere they could sit and socialise while their children or younger siblings played nearby, leading to the design of the pavilion.



Image: Municipality of Renca

Camina Segura, Renca

In response to persistent street harassment, the Municipality of Renca launched *Camina Segura* or ‘Walk Safely’, a free escort service allowing women and LGBTQIA+ individuals to call community safety officers. The initiative was launched in November 2023 and the programme also established over 20 Safe Walking Points in local businesses, schools, and cultural centres. Staff in these spaces receive training to provide immediate support, contact family members, alert Community Security and offer a safe haven if harassment occurs. Introduced alongside the *Yo Te Creo SOS* and a broader 2024 Safety Strategy, this initiative fills a crucial gap: women often delay reporting harassment for up to seven years. Mayor Claudio Castro emphasised that the combination of structured accompaniment, visible safe zones, and supportive institutions boosts trust and empowers women to reclaim public spaces.



Image: Los Angeles Commission on the Status of Women

Look Again Campaign, Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has launched a public campaign to raise awareness of the realities of human trafficking in Los Angeles. Directed by the City Council, CSW also worked with the Los Angeles Police Department and the Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development on their Summer Night Lights programme, which provided safe spaces and activities for at-risk youth at night. CSW helped to establish a pilot programme to provide training on human trafficking and how to properly spot and report instances to authorities during Summer Night Lights.



Image: UNCDF, Olusoji Seye

Women for Water and Peace, Freetown

Freetown’s Mayor and city leaders are tackling struggles unique to women and girls, particularly around water collection. Girls often face sexual harassment while fetching water, with some young men exploiting their role as water caretakers by demanding sex in exchange—a practice known as “wata fo wata.” Women and girls are also harassed on their way to water sources, contributing to adolescent pregnancy, stigma, and community conflict. To address this, the city launched “Women for Water and Peace,” funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund and implemented in collaboration with the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the International Labour Organization (ILO). By appointing women as water kiosk gatekeepers, 200 young women and 45 leaders now manage and use 25 kiosks, creating livelihoods, clean water access, and safer access to water for girls.

Policy and Organisations

This section looks at the possible role the Office for Women can play in urban development. It suggests various models for mainstreaming gender inclusion principles into development projects and across local government departments.

Existing assets

The Office for Women provides strong leadership for advancing gender equity and inclusion across the built environment sector. It has the power to convene external stakeholders and internal departments from across metro council to address issues facing women. The office runs capacity-building and training programmes and recruits an annual cohort of Ambassadors representing every metro council district to support the delivery of projects and initiatives. Ambassadors act as community connectors and could ensure that the voices and needs of women are integrated into city planning and urban design projects.

The soon to be formed Department of Transportation also presents an opportunity to embed gender inclusive principles across all transport decisions and understand movement through the city through a gender lens. Existing networks and forums such as the Domestic Violence Prevention and Coordinating Council and Women's Caucus already bring together stakeholders and partners to deliver safety initiatives. The city's latest Health Equity Report is transforming the way public health data is shared and health is understood as a human right. The creation of a Community Advisory Board, comprised of 21 residents who scrutinise and support public health policy, offers a model for how community boards can be established to provide feedback and guidance on various workstreams such as data gathering, policy development and community engagement. Being a part of the CHANGE network also provides an opportunity to share progress with an international audience and learn from partner cities.



Case Study

The Louisville Office for Women runs an annual programme to recruit, train and support a cohort of Office for Women Ambassadors. The cohort includes women and non-binary people representing all the metro council districts. The cohort develops leadership skills, learns about issues facing women in the city and acts as a community connector to enhance the Office for Women's capacity to deliver training and initiatives.

Insights

6. Complex and overlapping city, state and federal governance is a barrier to delivering safety improvements

The governance structures of the city, with a merged city and county local government since 2003, mean that the Metro Council must meet the needs of very different constituents. Large parts of the county are rural and sparsely populated and Metro Council investments and programmes are stretched over a wide area. At a political level, the concerns of urban residents are sometimes pitted against the needs of rural communities. The state legislature was also brought up as an added layer of governance to negotiate and work with. Once again, city employees expressed a feeling that the needs of the urban area were not being met by state-wide policies. This was raised in relation to road and street design standards that are set at the state level and have been written with rural communities in mind making it difficult to design streets to better suit a denser urban context.

The division of municipal responsibilities across other agencies, such as the Municipal Sewer District (MSD), and the presence of other incorporated cities located within the boundaries of the Metro region further fragment governance and make it difficult to set local government-wide priorities and ways of working. During our visit, the MSD was brought up as an example of a public authority successfully securing community benefits through its procurement and contract awards. These community benefits include charitable donations to community groups, skills and training opportunities and in-kind support for local organisations. There was a suggestion that this model could be extended to Metro Louisville departments as well to create consistent, city and county-wide approaches for using public contracts to secure local benefits.

One of the challenges highlighted by Metro Council workers was the reliance on grant funding to deliver projects and priorities. These grants do not include specific goals or reporting

requirements around gender and the issue of women's safety is often therefore not prioritised or considered in applications, funding agreements and programmes of work. Where grants are secured and successfully fund programmes, they are often project-based, time-limited and do not support systems-level change in the ways projects are delivered and planned. There is an opportunity to embed gender inclusive thinking and requirements in grants and funding programmes run by the Metro Council. There is also the potential to lobby and make the case for including gender considerations in state and federal grants as well. A city worker said that:

“Federal organisations need to include gender equity principles as specific outcomes and measurables in their grants. If it is included in the grant, we don’t have the option to ignore it.”

7. There is a need for stronger storytelling and more compelling evidence bases to make the case for change

The stories and experiences of women, girls and gender diverse people could be more systematically captured, recorded, disseminated and used to shape design projects of various scales. This will support the built environment sector to understand the nature of women's experiences and needs and include these considerations in development processes.

There is an opportunity to embed the expertise and lived experiences of Office for Women Ambassadors into all public realm projects as expert advisors, community connectors or engagement facilitators. Another approach for mainstreaming gender into all public realm projects is to convene an internal gender equity task force or working group to meet regularly and identify opportunities for projects across local government to engage with women creatively, gather their views and shape design proposals at an early stage.

The principle that development and planning processes should be done with the consent of community groups was made strongly during the street tagging workshops. There are specific research methodologies and governance structures that can distribute power over planning and design processes to women, girls and gender diverse people. Strong and consistent engagement in a design process can also unlock some of the benefits the project is seeking to achieve by making people feel listened to and like the space is being designed with their needs in mind. As one workshop participant in Smoketown put it:

“Participating in the street tagging workshop in my childhood neighbourhood left me feeling seen, valued, and encouraged that the future I envision in Smoketown and the city of Louisville, specifically for black and brown women, is possible”.

Engagement and workshops that invite women, girls and gender diverse people to share their experience with professionals can also support them to be trained and upskilled to think about the design of their neighbourhoods and inspired to think about the role they could play to shape cities and public spaces. In La Casita Centre, one of the teenagers who participated in the design workshop reflected after the park design exercise Publica facilitated that:

“I never knew I cared so much about parks.”

The teenager also expressed a desire to pursue a career in urban design or landscape architecture. Designing safer cities will require training a new generation of built environment practitioners with the skills to listen to the lived experiences of women, girls and non-binary people and articulate strategies, proposals and interventions to address their needs. There is an opportunity to use community engagement events to upskill young people and introduce them to these skills and the sector.



A workshop participant and local artist in Smoketown shares details of growing up in the neighbourhood and the impact of a housing renewal project on the area



Collage from the workshop with teenagers at La Casita Centre

Opportunities

1. Embed gender inclusion actions and reporting into government processes and grant requirements

Embed gender inclusive principles into projects, grants and funds managed by the council including requirements to report on interventions that support women, girls and gender diverse people's safety or collecting gender disaggregated data.

2. Conduct a study assessing women's transportation needs

Conduct a gender-disaggregated transportation and movement study through the city to understand how women's transport needs and behaviours may differ and to ensure transport investments are meeting these needs.

3. Establish a gender equity in public space task force

Convene a gender equity task force or working group internally and meet regularly to identify opportunities to include a specific piece of gender research or engagement in design projects or review briefs and tenders that are published to include gender considerations.

4. Ensure city procurement secures community benefits

Develop a procurement strategy that embeds community benefits in all city procurement activities.

5. Include gender considerations in project briefs

Include gender engagement in briefs when tendering for architectural, planning or engagement services.

6. Develop training for Office for Women Ambassadors to facilitate public engagement and act as community connectors

Develop training for Office for Women Ambassadors to facilitate public engagement and act as community connectors. Embed Office for Women Ambassadors on design projects, and have a seat at the table for them when development plans are being discussed and approved.

7. Have the Office for Women at the table in all policy decisions that relate to women's safety

Include representatives from the Office for Women and experts in women's safety and gender-based violence in all stages of policy- and decision-making that relate to women's safety.

8. Collect and share gender disaggregated data

Make gender disaggregated data available where it exists and commission studies that look at the particular experiences of women, girls and gender diverse people in the city to support partners to advocate, apply for grants and address gender inequities.

Case Studies



Image: Sortkat

PLURAL Centre of Masculinities, Barcelona
A municipal facility aimed at the male population that seeks to promote more open, respectful and healthy relationship models. Precisely because men are also gendered, reflecting on the impacts that certain ways of being men have on their own lives, and changing them, will advance the path towards gender equality. Plural aims to foster a diverse, positive and plural perspective of masculinity, helping to generate different collective perceptions from the strictest and outdated meaning of “being a man” or “behaving like a man”.



Image: Quezon City

Quezon City Gender and Development Council Office
The Quezon City Gender and Development (GAD) Council Office’s mission is to advance women’s and marginalised people’s rights, promote and mainstream gender equality. The office envisions Quezon City as a model of rights-based, gender-responsive governance where women are free from oppression, violence, and discrimination. It coordinates and implements all city GAD-related activities, providing administrative and logistical support. The office also leads the preparation of the GAD Database and neighbourhood Violence Against Women reports.

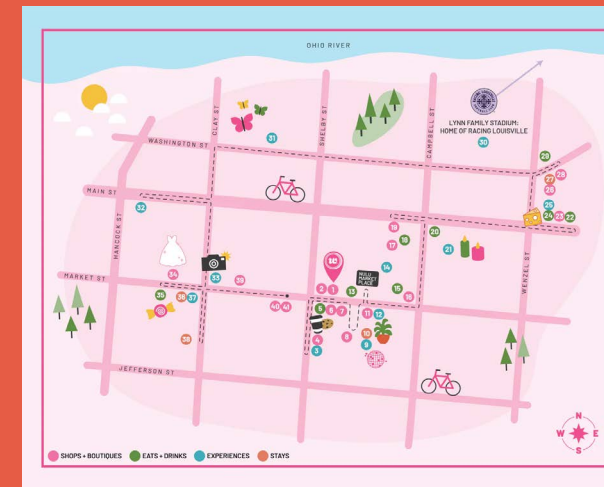
Cultural Norms

This chapter emphasises how foundational the safety of women, girls and gender diverse people is to the economic, social and cultural vitality of the city. City-wide priorities, such as economic growth and public health improvements, depend on people feeling safe in their neighbourhoods. It is fundamental to understand who currently does not feel safe and how that impacts their movement through the city, access to opportunities and sense of belonging. It also emphasises that cultural norms are dynamic and can be influenced through public campaigns and broader cultural conversations as mediated through media, community organisations and arts events.

Existing assets

The Mayoral priorities for the city support the safety and sense of belonging for women in Louisville. There is a strong commitment from the Mayor to reduce violent crime and improve public safety. Other mayoral priorities, such as access to early childhood education and delivering more affordable homes, address some of the needs and challenges identified in this report and are fundamental to supporting women and caregivers and helping the city thrive. Funding for specific projects, such as safety interventions in the LouMed district, the development of an entertainment and residential district around Lynn Family Stadium and investments in public transport, provide opportunities for the recommendations of this report to be embedded in emerging projects. The city is also home to organisations and activists, such as Lipstick Wars, who are promoting joyful conversations about women's experiences, needs and realities in Louisville.

Case Study



Racing Louisville is the city's National Women Soccer League (NWSL) team and is the only top-tier professional sports franchise in Louisville. The team was established in 2021 and plays at the recently built Lynn Family Stadium in Butchertown, close to downtown. The area surrounding the stadium has been zoned to support the development of denser housing and downtown uses to create a new neighbourhood around the stadium. The team ownership is exploring ideas for better connecting the stadium to the nearby NuLu district and worked with Women Owned Wallet to sponsor a map and tour of women-owned businesses in NuLu. Other ideas include developing safer walking routes to the stadium through the use of creative lighting and murals.

Insights

8. There is no language to talk about gender equity and women's safety

The issue of language, and specifically a lack of generally accepted and widely understood terms to discuss gender equality, was consistently raised across all levels of local government. Terms such as equity and inclusion are understood to have specific meanings relating to racial equity and disability access respectively. Where projects are specifically addressing equity and inclusion principles, intersecting gender issues are not considered, monitored or reported on. It is difficult to even discuss gender equity as people are not accustomed to understanding diversity and inclusion from this perspective. We also heard from the Domestic Violence Prevention and Coordinating Council that it can be a challenge to frame violence against women as an issue that intersects with other forms of violence. It is instead seen as being of secondary concern.

Built environment sector professionals and elected officials alike want guidance on the language that could be used to embed the principles of gender inclusive design into projects, programmes and briefs. This was framed in terms of creating liveable, vital and thriving neighbourhoods as well as designing with quality of life 'for all' in mind. It is important to address what these terms mean through a gender lens. Issues such as understanding and mapping the spatial aspects of caring responsibilities or surveying the gender diversity of built environment sector professionals can provide useful entry points to start talking about gender inclusion.

Specific forms of violence against women and girls in public spaces, such as street harassment, were often relegated as secondary concerns in the face of gun violence and road safety. Safety in Louisville is understood in terms of these two domains of safety and the widespread view is that men and boys are at higher risk. The everyday instances of sexual harassment and the ways in which women, girls and gender diverse people

change or limit their behaviours in public spaces in the face of these risks and inconveniences are trivialised by comparison. The prospect of violence in public space is constantly on women, girls and gender diverse people's minds. One teenage participant simply said that:

“I only feel safe at home. Home is the only place I feel calm”.

Fear of violent crime in public space is an everyday and constant reality for many girls. The gendered nature of this violence (e.g. sexual harassment and assault) means that a gendered analysis and action plan is essential.

9. Public programming and dialogue is essential to transform cultural attitudes and expectations about gender-based violence

Programmes of self-defence, public awareness campaigns, messaging and safety charters can all be effective tools to support safety in public spaces. Campaigns, accreditations and cultural programming can also be mobilised to create a public discourse about the nature of gender-based violence, to shore up confidence about intervening when it happens and to advocate for investment in women's services. These can also send the message to perpetrators that gender-based violence is taken seriously, there are systems to hold people to account and that it will not be tolerated. This can be particularly important in spaces many women told us don't feel safe such as bars and night time venues. The presence of well-trained staff and a clearly communicated commitment to women's safety from venue management can signal that these spaces are safe to spend time in.

Bystander intervention training across communities, businesses and the public sector is a tried and tested approach to achieve cultural transformation. It creates space for a nuanced conversation about the nature of gender-based violence, how to spot it and how to safely intervene and support survivors. This

approach places community safety in the hands of community members and builds local capacity.

On top of this, local community groups and grassroots arts organisations offer spaces for survivors' voices to be heard. For example, the Lipstick Wars Poetry Slam provides a platform for diverse groups of women, particularly women of colour, to express their experiences of survivorship and advocate for investment in women's services and societal transformation. They are actively engaged with the community and collaborate with local organisations and schools to bring poetry and self-expression to a wider audience. Through these partnerships and outreach programs, they have inspired a new generation of poets and empowered them to use their words to enact positive change. At each slam, local women's services and women-owned businesses have stands to share information and sell their products. This raises awareness of services that are available as well as providing a platform for small women-owned businesses, many of whom do not have commercial premises. Lipstick wars, and organisations like them, are essential in cultivating conversations about women's experiences on their own terms and through their own voices, articulating the societal assumptions and changes that are needed, and building community capacity to deliver that change.

During our conversations with communities, improving dialogue with the built environment sector to design spaces with women, girls and gender diverse people to support their needs and safety was framed as an inspiring, proactive and positive approach. Although it was recognised that spaces cannot be designed to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence there was a sense that urban designers can create environments where people are present, visible, confident and competent to respond to sexual harassment and violence when they witness it. By distributing interventions spatially, embedding responses in local contexts and taking an approach that places importance on the extent to which people feel a sense of belonging, a wider range of safety tools and interventions are unlocked. This contrasts

with the widespread conception that the narrow use of security infrastructure is the only solution for ensuring safety.

10. The real and perceived lack of public safety is a barrier to achieving other strategic priorities

The real and perceived lack of public safety for women, girls and gender diverse people in public spaces prevents the city from meeting wider strategic priorities. For example, it shapes people's transport choices, with people expressing a preference to visit places with parking to avoid having to move through streets at night. The perceived lack of public safety was framed by one domestic violence specialist as a barrier to women accessing support, with the fear of being outside outweighing the risks of staying in an abusive relationship. This was characterised by the

“Why do you care about what happens in my home when I can't be safe on the street?”

domestic violence specialist as:

This has a knock-on impact on businesses, employment and economic development. One small business owner described closing her shop when the sun sets to avoid having to go home in the dark for fear for her and her staff's safety. Access to amenities and services after dark, economic growth and opportunities to socialise are all limited because of widely held beliefs about public safety in the city. Ensuring women and caregivers feel safe in the city will help Louisville thrive.

Other issues, such as public and affordable housing, shape the ways women, girls and gender diverse people can access resources and support in the city. The lack of affordable housing prevents women from leaving abusive relationships and the lack of reliable public transport can be a barrier to accessing everyday services and needs for many women. Creating a city that is safe for women, girls and gender diverse people therefore requires mainstreaming gender inclusion across all aspects of local government services and identifying for each city-wide strategic priority the gender implications and opportunities to advance safety.

Opportunities

1. Implement a women’s safety charter campaign in NuLu and around the Lynn Family Stadium

Trial a safety charter campaign in NuLu and around the Lynn Family Stadium to build on the work by Women-Owned Wallet and establish a network of businesses committed to supporting women’s safety.

2. Develop training for businesses

Develop and roll out business training to ensure staff can spot and intervene when they witness sexual harassment or other types of predatory behaviours.

3. Roll out a public awareness campaign

Develop a public awareness campaign targeting perpetrators of sexual harassment outlining what is acceptable behaviour in public.

Case Studies



Image: City of Paris

Violence Meter, Paris

The Violence Meter (*Violentomètre*) is a simple tool developed by the City of Paris to help women and girls identify signs of abuse in their intimate relationships. It uses a colour scale: green for healthy, yellow for concerning, red for dangerous. Each colour outlines specific behaviours ranging from “shows affection” to “controls your actions” to “threatens your life.” Originally adapted from a Canadian model by the Centre Hubertine Auclert, it is now widely distributed in schools, libraries, youth centres and metro stations. The tools was designed to be visually accessible and non-judgemental, the meter invites self-reflection and encourages early recognition of psychological, emotional, and physical abuse. It is used by teachers, youth workers and social services as a conversation starter, particularly with teens and young women. By offering clear language and a spectrum of behaviours, it helps people name violence before it escalates.

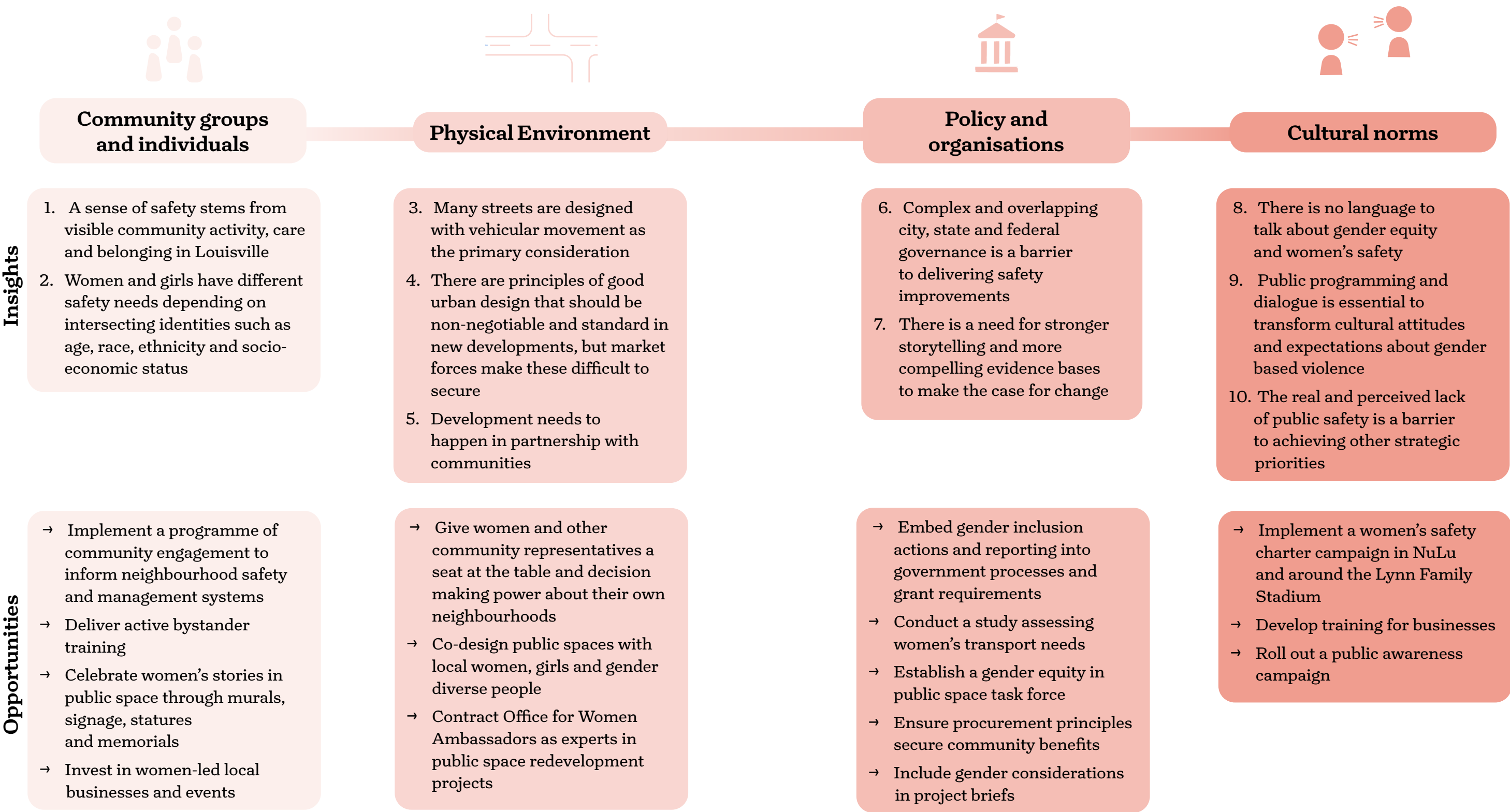


Image: City of Tokyo

Tokyo Women’s Plaza

Tokyo Women’s Plaza (TWP) is a government-run resource centre that gathers data on domestic violence through free consultation services. TWP caters to survivors of domestic violence. The centre also provides legal advice, educational seminars, and awareness-raising workshops for the broader community. The public awareness events and seminars hosted by TWP are designed in response to feedback from consultation and data from reports to ensure they are constantly adapting to the needs of those they are serving.

Summary of key findings and opportunities





Appendix 1

Smoketown



Introduction

Publica was invited to facilitate and document a public realm audit in the Smoketown neighbourhood of Louisville.

A simple street tagging method that invited participants to ‘tag’ features in the public realm as either supportive of their safety and promoting a feeling of belonging or contributing to a feeling of exclusion and insecurity was used to develop a collective safety map of the neighbourhood.

The discussion and workshop findings will be used to inform future revitalisation plans as part of the Broadway All the Way public realm scheme to the north of the Smoketown neighbourhood. The location for the workshop was chosen as it marks one of the bookends of the major public realm and transport projects in the city. Street tagging as a method can be used anywhere to quickly audit a neighbourhood and draw out people’s safety experiences when walking through spaces.

The workshop invited Louisville Metro Council workers from teams such as Planning, Sustainability, Safe and Healthy Neighbourhoods, Public Works, the Office for Housing and Community Development as well as a resident and activist and members of the Office for Women Ambassadors cohort. The aim of the workshop was also to showcase the auditing methodology and discuss its potential for other city projects. On top of this, it sought to establish some principles for public realm programmes and proposals in the Smoketown neighbourhood.

Discussion

The workshop began with a brief discussion of what safety means to people.

Safety was framed by one participant as feeling at ease, comfortable, and relaxed. It was about not having to scan your surroundings for potential threats or danger. It was also understood as a feeling of being supported, cared for and having your needs met. Other participants also shared that the presence of other women or children on the street, as well as services for them and other vulnerable groups, made them feel safer. This was summarised by one participant as feeling safer when they simply see that a space is for someone like them.

These descriptions of safety, where the presence of other people, supportive services and amenities are foregrounded, were framed in opposition to the common understanding of safety as an individualised experience. It was also recognised that perceptions of safety, as opposed to simply crime statistics and occurrences of crimes in an area, are important drivers of what makes people feel safe and how safety shapes their behaviours. This reframes the visible care for the environment as a safety issue. Signs of a lack of care or investment such as vacant properties, poorly managed green spaces, litter and degraded footways become safety issues, not because these increase or cause crime but rather because of their impact on perceptions of safety. These perceptions have a material impact on people's behaviours and how they may limit their movement through the city to avoid places that feel unsafe.

The issue of vacancy and unused parcels of land further contributes to spaces that are devoid of people, feel less welcoming and lack energy. Participants described being alone as one of the scariest conditions. Conversely, places that are animated with public art, murals and other public realm interventions feel safer and cared for. These interventions also offer the chance to celebrate a diversity of people in public spaces. Although often seen as secondary, these types of interventions can signal to people that they belong and that they

matter. They can also be a signal of investment in a community when their histories are drawn out in public spaces. Investments in public art signal that a city cares about the experience of moving through it and values beauty. This was a key safety priority for workshop participants.

Participants also recognised the role of public space infrastructure in providing the baseline conditions of safety such as wide pavements that allow for pushchairs, wheelchairs, walking side-by-side with a child and inviting people with diverse mobility needs to use the space. These considerations for physical safety infrastructure extend to traffic lights and allowing enough time to cross for pedestrians and accessibility interventions such as auditory crossing points.

Other infrastructure such as benches and public toilets were also brought up as vital infrastructure to support people to spend time outside their homes and ensure spaces are accessible and inclusive for a diverse range of needs. Lighting, was brought up as a factor that can ensure good visibility and long sightlines at night. Participants reflected that walking through the area at night would have felt very different and likely would have felt unsafe due to a lack of street lighting.

Safety for many is also considered in the context of road safety. This is particularly the case as the city does not have an extensive public transport network and it is difficult to live in the city without a car. Streets are designed for a single particular type of user and do not meet a diversity of needs or support diverse modes of transport.

Key Findings

Following the street tagging exercise, the group reconvened on Broadway to discuss the key findings and reflections.

A sense of community and neighbourliness

Participants reflected on the hyper-locality of the city and the strong sense of identity in clearly distinct neighbourhoods. Many participants had never been to Smoketown before and they reflected on the dividing lines that characterise their experiences of the city. The experiences of outsiders were contrasted with those of locals who know the area well, feel very at ease and have ties to the community that promote their feelings of safety. Participants felt that the neighbourhood had a strong and



palpable sense of community with residents stopping by and talking to them, calling from their front porches or initiating conversations. This created the feeling that residents were looking out for one another and their neighbourhood. This

informal and passive surveillance played an important safety role for many of the participants.

This sense of there being a community in the area was strengthened by the presence of multiple large street art murals. These were felt to speak to the community that exists and enliven the area. The murals were a signal that the area was cared for and celebrated.

Lack of seating and amenities

Participants consistently identified and noted the lack of public amenities in the neighbourhood. The lack of seating was particularly striking for many. This lack of infrastructure was most noticeable in a playspace that provided no seating for parents or children. This signalled that the area was not intended as a place to dwell or spend time in but rather somewhere to simply pass through. Where people did sit, socialise and dwell, this typically occurred on private porches overlooking the street. The Metro Council has been dealing with issues of anti-social behaviour on benches and the maintenance costs are high to address vandalism leading to many benches being removed by the city to save on these costs.

This impression of the area as a place to pass through was further reinforced by the lack of bicycle parking that strengthens the role of the street and neighbourhood as a thoroughfare. Although the area included road markings for bicycle lanes, the lack of bicycle parking meant that these lanes were viewed as infrastructure solely for the use of commuters. For some participants, this transfer of road space in the neighbourhood for the sole use of people passing through the area, rather than those who live in the area, was compared to a form of policing and control.

The lack of pavements in places, or the narrowness of pavements of poor quality in others, further contribute to accessibility issues and make it difficult to navigate the area on foot. Combined with the lack of seating, these features make the area inaccessible for many different users.

Blank and vacant spaces

The abundance of vacant lots, brownfields and empty plots of land, surface car parks and industrial yards were all brought up as features that contribute to a lack of activity, passive surveillance and life on the street. These gaps in the urban fabric break up the continuity of streets, create pockets of inactivity and contribute to a general sense of unease. These spaces signal a lack of care and investment in the area. The impact of these spaces was heightened when barbed wire, chain-link fencing and other hostile architectures were deployed to delineate and demarcate these plots of land. These features send the message that people are not welcome and that spaces must be protected from criminal activity.

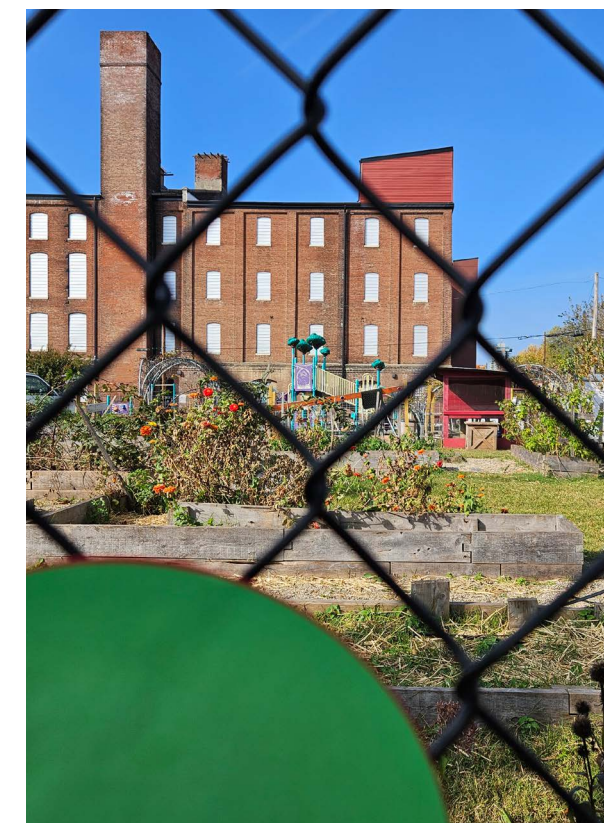


Access to food and food education

Despite the visible sense of community, participants identified the lack of places to buy fresh food as a barrier to health in the area, further entrenching car dependency and excluding those who do not have access to a car and rely instead on local liquor stores and gas stations for daily food purchases. Safety in this

context was framed as access to fresh, affordable and healthy food.

The walk passed by a community garden and spaces such as these were highlighted as community assets that bring into productive uses spaces that would otherwise be vacant. Community gardens were valued for the role they played in bringing activity to underused sites, providing fresh food and offering educational programmes and events.



Quality of design

Where new housing or development is apparent, participants felt that the design quality was poor and that new buildings were not positively contributing to the character of the area. Furthermore, the choice of materials was questioned as was the sustainability of these newer buildings.

These issues are particularly heightened in neighbourhoods with a history of housing renewal and programmes of Housing Project clearances. New housing can represent the breaking up of past communities and lives. One former resident of the projects in Smoketown in Shepherd Square, which received HOPE VI funding in 2011 to demolish the existing housing and replace it with mixed-income housing, shared that many of the people she grew up with had been displaced and unable to find permanent housing, with some still in precarious housing situations over a decade later.

Green infrastructure

The presence of mature trees plays a strong role in softening landscapes and contributes to the sense of welcome and belonging. Participants appreciated seeing saplings and newly planted trees and identified the impact of trees providing shade and cooling in a neighbourhood with below average tree cover. Some vacant plots were highlighted as providing positive green spaces where wildflowers grow.



Discussion points

Street art

The group stopped outside the mural by Liz Richter on the corner of South Shelby and East Breckinridge. Depicting a Black woman breastfeeding, the mural draws attention to the higher-than-average infant mortality rate in the neighbourhood and women and children's health. The mural is also a celebration of the local community with a line from the Kentucky-born poet Wendell Berry painted alongside the mural saying simply "What we need is here."



Mural by Liz Richter on the corner of South Shelby and East Breckinridge



Group discussion on Lampdon Street

Housing renewal

The local resident and artist that grew up in the Shepherd Square projects shared her memories of the area. She enjoyed growing up in the neighbourhood and knowing everyone. She still feels safe in the neighbourhood but has mixed emotions when she sees the new development. Shepherd Square was built in 1943 and all 326 affordable housing units were demolished in 2011 and replaced with 255 lower density, mixed-tenure housing. The development was Louisville's third HOPE VI funded neighbourhood revitalisation project.

Appendix 2

Russell



Introduction

Publica was invited to facilitate and document a public realm audit in the Russell neighbourhood.

Using a simple street tagging methodology that invited participants to ‘tag’ features in the public realm as either supportive of their safety and promoting a feeling of belonging or contributing to a feeling of exclusion and insecurity, the exercise was used to develop a collective safety map of the neighbourhood, and inform future revitalisation plans as part of the Broadway All the Way public realm scheme.

The workshop invited Louisville Metro Council officers from Planning, Office for Equity, Safe and Healthy Neighbourhoods, Public Works, as well as a resident and activist from Russell Place of Promise, Play Cousins, the Louisville Parks Alliance and members of the Office for Women Ambassadors cohort.

Discussion

The workshop began with a brief introduction to the work of Play Cousins and Russell Place of Promise.

Russell Place of Promise was founded six years ago in 2018 as a social enterprise and non-profit incubated within Louisville Metro Council to promote and deliver Black Wealth Building in Russell. They have partnered with organisations such as Play Cousins Collective, a Black family collective and non-profit, to deliver business and housing support, develop local leadership, develop arts and story-telling projects, preserve local histories and ensure neighbourhood improvements are delivered with and for the local Black population.

The workshop sought to explore how the built environment shapes perceptions of safety. It intended to develop a clear collective voice for the types of actionable policies, investments and improvements that could support the safety of women, girls and gender diverse people in Russell and other neighbourhoods around the city.

Concerns were raised by participants that in the context of a neighbourhood undergoing processes of gentrification, dispossession and displacement, any investment in the built environment and public realm might accelerate these processes. This was framed as the idea that with investment in an area comes ownership (of property) and an expectation of a return on investment. This extractive mindset was likened to colonialism and extortion. Some new investors were solely in the neighbourhood to extract value out of it. Safety in this context was seen in the long-term as safety from displacement and knowledge that community ties that exist today will last to the next generation. This was framed by one participant as “Safety for me exists over a twenty-year span: will the community still be here? Will my children have access to these spaces? Will I recognise the neighbourhood and be welcomed here? Will our homes be passed down to our children?”.

This highlighted the importance of mapping power at the start of any project and rebalancing power to ensure that findings and recommendations are reviewed by local communities, priorities are set by residents and investments are assessed for their potential to further entrench systemic and historic injustices. These concerns led participants to set a principle that research and development in the built environment should always be done sensitively, with the consent of the communities that live in the neighbourhood and through participative and deliberative processes.

Safety was framed by one participant as not thinking about how they are perceived in public spaces. Safety is not about fitting in but rather about belonging and being able to present however you want in public. Another participant spoke about the need for access to resources. This understanding of safety was linked to having one’s needs met. A third lens for understanding safety addressed the extent to which a neighbourhood feels cared for. This framing draws attention to the maintenance of public spaces and amenities such as sidewalks and green spaces as well as the wider sense of community and collective responsibility and care for one another within a neighbourhood. It also highlighted the extent to which a visible lack of investment impacts people’s perceptions of safety.

Participants reflected on the issue of policing in their neighbourhood and the sense of threat that can come with the police. One participant stated that it can be complicated and conflicting being a Black woman in the city. Another echoed that she would not call the police unless her life was in immediate danger and risk because they felt no control over these institutions and little accountability from them towards the community. This was summarised by one participant as “If I call the police, I might die. Or the person I call the police on might die”. Safety is very personal, linked to personal histories, the stories we tell about certain places and certain people, and there are tensions between differing safety needs and experiences.

Key Findings

Following the street tagging exercise, the group reconvened to discuss the key findings and reflections

Community presence

Participants reflected on the positive experience of meeting a Violence Interrupter on the audit from the Office for Safe and Healthy Neighbourhoods. This familiar face embodied a positive Black masculinity of care for the neighbourhood and investment in community resources. People like the Violence Interrupter can build relationships of care, support and safety outside of the power dynamics that police officers typically operate within.



There was a demand for more roles such as these where safety is framed through deep connection and everyday relationships with the community. This was seen as particularly important in the context of a neighbourhood where social trust is eroding, disinvestment is systemic and people feel less able to rely on neighbours to support them.

Places to gather

One participant noted that socially gathering in groups is a feature of Black culture, particularly for men. This can be seen as threatening by some people, is over-policed by law enforcement and means that there are very few places for people to gather anymore. They reflected that they would like to see more social spaces and places to gather in their neighbourhood.

Public health

Some participants felt that issues such as litter, poor drainage and strong smells in the neighbourhood reminded them of the health disparities and pollution in their neighbourhood. One participant shared that these smells were the only thing that would make her consider leaving West Louisville. These daily reminders of pollutants and lack of maintenance made people feel like their health was being compromised or in danger. Safety in this instance was framed as health and access to healthy environments.

This extended to thinking about access to healthy food, walkable neighbourhoods and public transport. Participants wanted to see traffic calming measures, narrower roads, wider and smoother pavements, slower traffic along residential streets and more infrastructure and amenities for people that lack access to a vehicle. They also wanted access to fresh food, convenience stores and other supportive infrastructure for a healthy life.



Signage

The navigability of the public realm was brought up as a safety issue. Signage was brought up as a minimum requirement to let people orient themselves. This was understood as a basic safety consideration. The suggestion was that street signs could be more consistently and prominently displayed at all intersections.

Community empowerment

There was a strong desire to have more community input into the ways in which the neighbourhood is changing. This was exemplified by the new 280-unit LDG affordable housing development. Local community groups felt they had not been consulted and were not able to shape the project. Community groups also wanted to see new businesses in the area that provide resources for the community but felt unable to shape these commercial decisions. In contrast to these experiences, Russell Place of Promise was developing its own site, drawing on genuine community input to set up a Community Land Trust (CLT).

Safety for participants was knowing that they had power, agency and a voice in their neighbourhood as it develops and changes. It was also about knowing that new developments would meet the highest standards for design quality and sustainability. This was particularly important in a historically Black neighbourhood undergoing processes of gentrification. In this context, the presence of outsiders and the arrival of new residents signalled a risk of imminent displacement. One participant framed this as “I feel unsafe when I see White people in the area as I assume they are here to make money off me”.

Role of businesses

Participants spoke of the role that private businesses could play in improving the neighbourhood. This ranged from small contributions to the custodianship of the public realm, through litter picking initiatives or management of the public realm by large commercial operators, to larger initiatives by organisations contracted by the city. The model of Community Benefits secured by the Municipal Sewer District was brought up as

an example whereby contractors for MSD projects commit to delivering positive social impacts through support to non-profit organisations, workforce development programmes or supporting local small businesses. Participants wanted to see clearer commitments from the private sector to improve the social conditions of the neighbourhoods they operate in.



Discussion points



New affordable housing in Russell



New community-led development

South 30th Street affordable housing

The group stopped to discuss the implications of a new 280-unit affordable housing complex on the neighbourhood. Concerns were raised about the scale and density of the development and the pressure this might put on parking and local services. There was frustration at the lack of engagement and the lack of amenities within the development. The new apartments were seen as being out of context, too dense and poorly designed. Despite the affordability of the new housing, community members felt that it would change the character of the area.

South 31st Street Community Land Trust

By contrast, the plot of remediated brownfield land on South 31st Street was seen as an example of what genuine community engagement and empowerment could look like. Sold by the city from its land bank to Russell Place of Promise for \$1, there are ambitions to use the site to create the city's first Community Land Trust (CLT). The model of a CLT allows the value of the project to be captured by the community and supports the delivery of affordable housing in perpetuity. The CLT will allow people to build wealth and equity in their communities without the threat of displacement.

Acknowledgements and thanks

Aida Copic, Al Andrews, Alena Balakos, Alex Herrin, Alisia Richardson, Amalia Gamez Guerra, Amanda Corzine, Amy Luckett, Ana Necia Williams, Andrew Lawson, Andrew McKinney, Angela Graham, Angela Madsen, Angela Richardson, Ashby Green, Ashlee Phillips, Ashley Bartley, Ashley Woolsey, Barry Clyde, Ben Harlan, Benjamin DeWitt, Breanna Carter, Brian Davis, Bridget Frailley, Brittany Hill-Whitehead, Brooke Pardue, Carole Yocum, Cassandra Webb, Catherine Gomez, Chad Bourke, Charity Pugh-Yelton, Cherokee Henrie, Chris Butz, Cindi Sullivan, Cishella Durling, Claire Yates, Corey Robinson, Mayor Craig Greenberg, Dahabo Kerow, Dave Miller, Deputy Mayor David James, David Kaplan, David Nicholson, Deandrea Baltimore, Doneah Marshall, Dorislee Gilbert, Esperance Ubuku, Ethan Lambert, Faith Augustine, Gabriel Goodpaster, Gianna Bennett, Gretchen Hunt, Hannah Brooks, Ishwanzya Rivers, Jackie Floyd, Jake Medley, Sgt. James Clark, James Maynard, Jamie Allen, Janayah Winn, Jason Canuel, Councilman Jecorey Arthur, Jeff Brown, Jenna Peterson, Councilwoman Jennifer Chappell, Jennifer Kern, Jessica Brown, Judge Jessica Moore, Joe Newland, John Ramsey, John Swintosky, Julia Williams, Rep. Josie Raymond, Karen Maynard, Karen Mohammadi, Karina Barillas, Kate Devers, Kelli Jones, Kristen Williams, Kylie Strehl, Laura Grabowski, Leah Pugh, Lia Yakumithis, Judge Lori Goodwin, Lou Lepping, Lucia Rodriguez, Mahoghany Livers, Maria Tori Matthew Barzun, Matt Haines, Melissa Ryan, Mia Thompson, Michelle King, Mike King, Mike Nolan, Mojgan Taghizadeh, Mollie Weisberg, Morgan Dunay, Nate Hammitt, Nathan Keltch, Nicholas Seivers, Nicole Carroll, Deputy Mayor Nicole George, Nicole Kaforski, Nicole Yates, Norma Ward, Patrick Piuma, Councilwoman Paula McCraney, Pete Flood, Prasanthi Persad, Priscilla Bowman, Raven Yousey, Rebecca Katz, Regina VargoCarrico, Rob Lush, Rob Monsma, Robin Hawkins, Ryan Dell, Sarah Wolff, Savannah Darr, Councilwoman Shameka Parrish-Wright, Shanice Nelson, Shannon Logan, Stacey Farnham, Stacy Keith, Starr Peters, Steve Kurowsky, Steven Arnold, Sumedha Rao, Terry Zink, Theirry Muhanuka, Vanessa McPhail, Wilson Ethington, Yamira Rafae

Stockholm

Contents

224	Executive summary
226	Background and context
228	Methodology
230	What we did
232	Introduction to Stockholm
238	Community Groups and Individuals
252	Physical Environment
268	Policy and Organisation
280	Cultural Norms
288	Summary of key findings and opportunities
292	Acknowledgements

Executive summary

Stockholms stad is leading an ambitious programme of public realm improvements, transport upgrades and housing developments in neighbourhoods across the city. There are significant opportunities to embed gender inclusive urban principles into the design, delivery and maintenance of these projects by more creatively, formally and systematically listening to women, girls and non-binary people's experiences.

One of the challenges this report seeks to address is the sense from some professionals in the built environment sector that projects are delivered by technical experts on behalf of people, rather than in collaboration with them. The risk is that what is delivered does not meet the needs of people and may reinforce a sense that a place has not been designed for marginalised groups. This risk of overlooking people's lived experiences is further exacerbated in a context where gender equity is perceived as being something that has already been secured despite strong evidence that safety experiences of women, girls and non-binary people differ markedly in Stockholm.

There are recent examples of best practices across the city, from murals designed and painted by young people in underpasses and places identified as being unsafe through community safety walks, to new pavilions and shelters designed with and for women and girls. These approaches could be scaled-up and incorporated into larger projects. There is also a need to more consistently develop and fund public space management plans to ensure that where new public spaces are delivered, the programming and managing of these spaces is considered through a gender and safety perspective.

The principles of gender inclusive public spaces could more formally be mainstreamed into all built environment projects through the appointment of dedicated gender inclusion project leads or the involvement of community safety teams in design review meetings. There are also opportunities to work more collaboratively with businesses and the teams that will be managing new public spaces to support the delivery of programmes and plans that support women, girls and non-binary people to develop a sense of safety and belonging in public spaces.

Background and context

About this report

This report summarises Publica CIC and CHANGE's collaborative project "Designing Safety, Building Belonging: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Urban Spaces". The study explores how the design of the built environment can make cities safer, more usable and more welcoming to women, girls, non-binary people and caregivers. The project draws on fieldwork in Louisville, Bogotá and Stockholm to understand how these cities are currently integrating gender inclusion principles into their policies and strategies to develop safe public spaces. This report documents the third and final of these site visits and explores the relationship between women's safety and urban development processes in Stockholm.

The report builds on fieldwork, engagement, quantitative and qualitative evidence and research to develop public space and urban design interventions and policy recommendations that address the most pressing challenges around women and girls' safety in public spaces. The research is intended to support Stockholms stad officers to mainstream gender inclusion principles in the development of the city's public realm and public transport. It provides resources and lessons for partner cities within the CHANGE network wanting to design safer public spaces in their own geographies.

About CHANGE

The City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE) is an international network of 17 cities dedicated to advancing the rights of women, girls, and people with diverse gender identities. We support cities in strengthening infrastructure, transforming social norms, and enhancing essential services for women. We work on 3 thematic areas: care, gender-based violence, and gender data.

About Publica CIC

Publica Community Interest Company (CIC) is a London-based non-profit organisation offering policy guidance, resources, toolkits, workshops and training to advance public discourses and professional practices around designing inclusive cities. Publica CIC leads a campaign for inclusive cities and conducts research and advocacy to better integrate gender inclusive design principles and the experiences of women, girls and non-binary people into built environment projects and policies through the use of creative and participatory methods.

Methodology

CHANGE and Publica organised a three-day visit to Stockholm to facilitate workshops, host roundtable discussions and lead training sessions with built environment professionals to identify current challenges and opportunities for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in public spaces. The workshops tested participatory methods with women, girls and non-binary people to understand perceptions of safety in public spaces and identify potential public realm interventions in Slussen and Rinkeby.

Publica facilitated public realm audits and workshops in the central neighbourhood of Slussen, located on the island of Södermalm and connecting it to Gamla Stan (the Old Town). The team also worked in the suburban centre of Rinkeby on the northern outskirts of the city within the municipal district of Järva. The audits used a simple street tagging method, where participants were invited to mark with a coloured sticker the features of the public realm that either contributed to, or detracted from, their sense of safety and belonging, to frame a discussion around safety interventions in public spaces. One of the audits in Slussen took place at night and Publica also led a youth collage-making workshop in Rinkeby.

The two locations for the workshops differ markedly in their demographic profiles and built fabric. The majority of residents in Rinkeby have an immigrant background with 76% of residents in the municipal district of Järva either born abroad or born to two parents who were born abroad compared to a figure of 20% for Södermalm. Safety experiences in the two neighbourhoods also differ with 50% of residents in Järva feeling safe to walk home alone at night and 62% agreeing that the district is a safe place to live compared to 64% and 83% of residents in Södermalm respectively.

The centre of Rinkeby is laid out around a pedestrian square with access to a metro station and commercial premises occupying ground floor units around the square. Residential apartment blocks are arranged around this centre and the neighbourhood is contained by road and traffic infrastructure. Meanwhile, Slussen is the main connection point between the south of the city and

the Old Town and northern districts. It is one of the city's oldest neighbourhoods and is a regionally significant transport hub and interchange. It is currently being redesigned according to a comprehensive masterplan. The project has radically altered the road layout, adding new cycling, bus and pedestrian infrastructure and delivering new public spaces, commercial premises and improved connections to the Old Town with the goal of having spaces where people can spend time and socialise without spending money. It represents the most significant and transformative urban project in central Stockholm.

Through workshops with older women, teenagers and residents of the two neighbourhoods, Publica explored current experiences of safety and belonging in public spaces. The findings of these workshops were shared with stakeholders of the Slussen project and municipal planning and community safety officers through a series of reflection sessions. The visit ended with a half-day workshop and training session with planners and real-estate developers from across municipal departments and city-owned companies to share international best practices.

What we did



Visiting recent urban design projects and raising awareness of these



Considering the re-design of the public square in Rinkeby



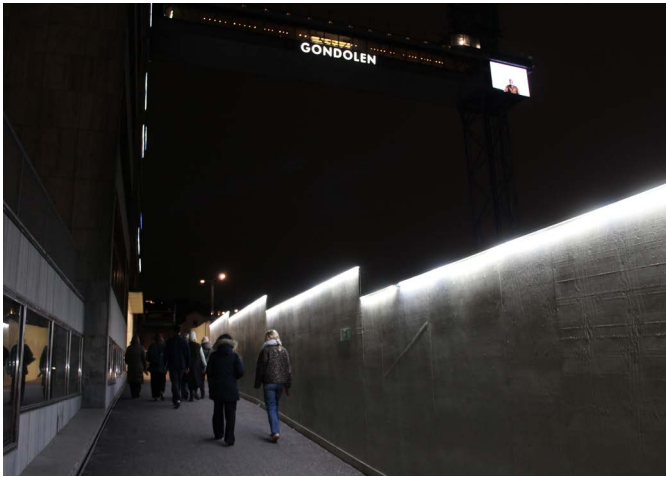
Facilitating engagement activities with young women and girls



Meeting stakeholders and project leads for Slussen



Training and upskilling built environment professionals



Facilitating a night walk in Slussen



Testing creative engagement methods and participative research approaches



Listening to community groups and conducting fieldwork

Introduction to Stockholm

City snapshot

Population: 988,900

Density: 5,288 residents per km²

Poverty rate: 1.9% of the population receives financial assistance

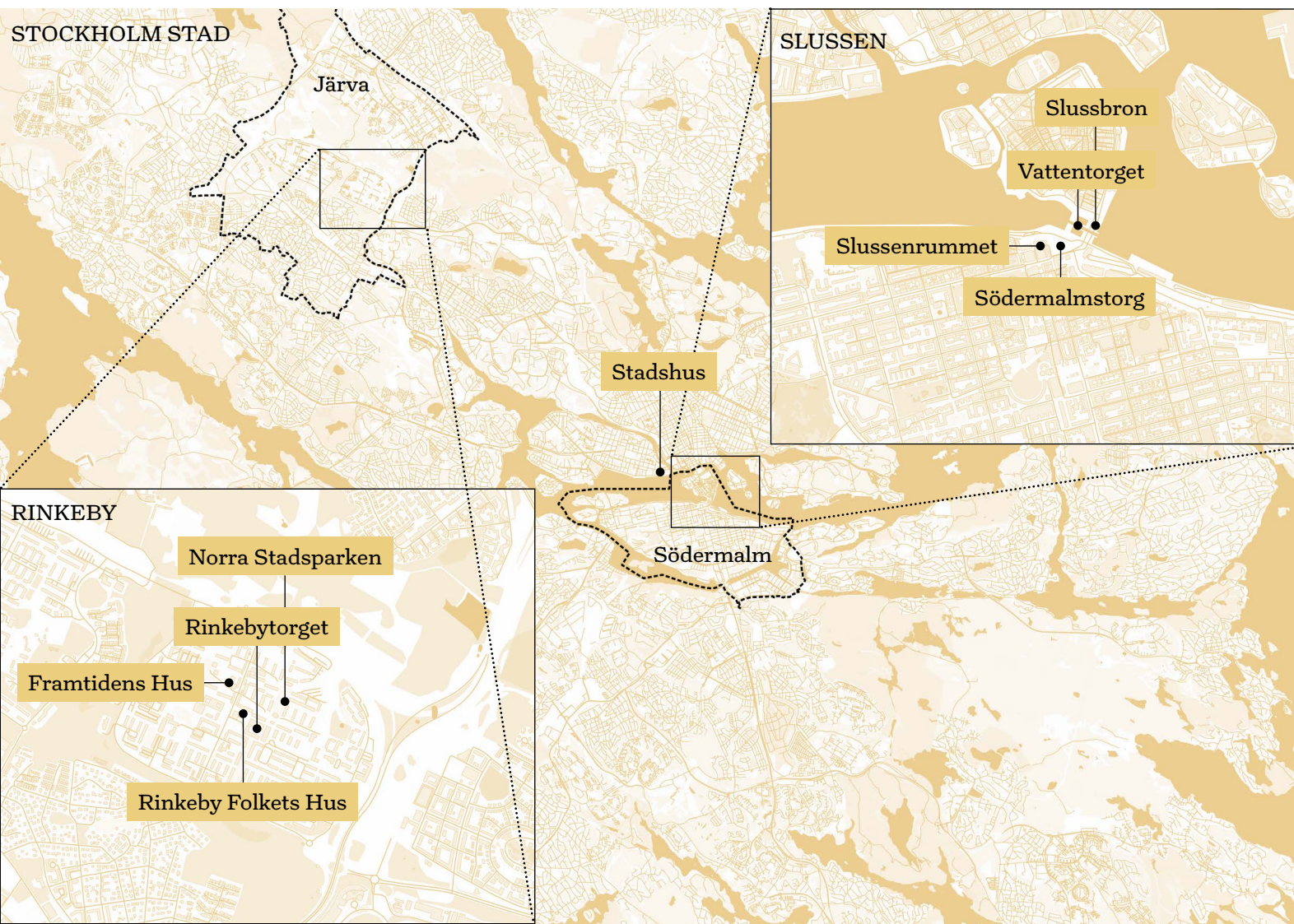
Foreign born population: 34,9% of residents born abroad or born to two parents that are foreign-born.

Mean household income: SEK 724,000 (approx. \$71,142)

Home ownership: 56%

Housing type: 82.4% live in multi-family housing

Female representation on city council: 51/101 – 50%



Themes

Neighbourhood segregation

Stockholm, like many of Sweden's large cities, is characterised by patterns of socio-economic and ethnic segregation. Many high density, modernist suburban centres are home to a large share of the city's lower income and foreign born population with the inner city markedly more ethnically homogeneous and wealthy. These suburban centres include large amounts of municipal, affordable multi-family homes for rent and many new migrants to Stockholm first settle in these neighbourhoods. The majority of these centres were built as part of the *Miljonprogrammet* (Million Programme) which saw the construction of a million homes in Sweden in the decade between 1965 and 1974. Although the programme built housing across a variety of typologies and tenures, including single-family housing and housing terraces for a range of incomes, the programme is most commonly associated with the large-scale use of prefabricated and standardised multi-family apartment blocks to provide affordable housing for lower income populations. In Stockholm, 180,000 new homes were built during the programme and a new district was built every year of the decade. Homes built during this period make up between one in four and one in five of the total housing stock today.

The district of Järva in the north of Stockholm municipality illustrates the ways in which housing tenure, ethnicity, income and migration status interact to segregate marginalised populations from wealthier neighbourhoods. It includes five large Million Programme neighbourhoods in Akalla, Husby, Hjulsta, Tensta and Rinkeby. 76% of the district's population are foreign born compared to 34.9% for the city as a whole. This represents more than one in five of all foreign born residents of Stockholm. It is the district with the highest share of in-migration from abroad (18% of people moving to the area in a given year are from abroad) and the highest share of people who change address in any given year that stay in the same district (65%), meaning that many people that live within the

district stay in the local area when they move homes. The district has the highest unemployment rate (6%), the highest rate of the population aged under 20 (26%) and the third highest rate of population growth (0.7% compared to 0.4% for the city as a whole).

Rising rates of violent crime

Recent years have seen a large amount of global media attention drawn to the rising rates of gun violence in Sweden. The rate of gun violence has doubled in the decade from 2013 and in 2022 and the country now consistently ranks among the top European countries for shootings and gun fatalities with figures peaking in 2022 with 391 total shootings and 62 fatalities across the country. This represents a rate 5.9 gun fatalities per million compared to an EU average of 1.6 gun deaths per million. The perpetrators of gun crimes are disproportionately young with 45% of suspects aged between 15 and 20 and men make up the vast majority of victims. Between 2020 and 2022, 80% of gun homicide victims were male. As a result, the per capita gun homicide rate in Sweden for people aged between 20-29 is 18 per million compared to between 0 and 4 per million in the rest of Europe in 2021.

In addition to rising gun violence there has been a dramatic rise in explosions (bomb attacks) in recent years. January 2025 alone saw 30 bombings in Stockholm. Much of this violence has been attributed to gang activity.

Gender mainstreaming

Sweden is widely considered a global model for gender equality. The Social Democrat-Green coalition government of 2014 declared itself the first feminist government and the OECD recognises the public sector as the most gender equal in the world. The country has a long history of the government taking feminist action and was an early adopter and pioneer of policies such as shared parental leave in 1974 and the introduction of a national gender mainstreaming policy in 1994. The law ensures that a gender equality perspective is applied to all policy areas

and states that in particular it should be applied to education, labour, economic and social policies. More recently, the country formed the Gender Equality Agency in 2018. The agency has six areas of action: equal distribution of power and influence; economic gender equality; gender equality in health, care and social services; gender equality in education; equal distribution of housework and unpaid care work; and tackling men's violence against women.

Despite this long history of government action, inequalities persist and the current government no longer refers to itself as a feminist government.



Community Groups and Individuals

This chapter outlines the ways in which everyday experiences of safety shape how women, girls and non-binary people move through the city. It makes the case for more consistently and creatively bringing these experiences into public realm design projects to shape how we design, manage and programme public spaces.

Existing assets

During Publica's visit, local residents expressed trust in the city government's ability to deliver public realm and transport projects that improve their lives. In Slussen, residents accepted that the disruptions caused by the transformation of the area over a ten-year construction period were necessary to improve the area. Regular dialogue and engagement between the local authority and community groups meant that people felt informed about the project. The use of a commercial ground floor unit in Slussen to display a model of the scheme and information about the project supported this ongoing dialogue. Outreach education programmes with schools following the discovery of archaeological artefacts on the site further supported widespread engagement with school-aged children.

Across all 11 districts in the municipality, regular twice yearly community dialogues ensure the municipality is aware of the needs of residents, their feelings about their local areas and the things they would like to see improved. Programmes such as yearly activations of streets and public spaces during the summer (*Levande Stockholm*) and subsidised or free public transport for young people during school holidays promote independent mobility and strengthen social and community ties. An extensive internship programme for young people during school holidays brings young people into their local government offices and supports them to contribute to the design, maintenance and improvement of their local neighbourhoods. These programmes support people to develop a sense of trust

and ownership over their neighbourhoods and support positive engagement with their local areas.

In Rinkeby, Publica visited community facilities that host specific groups and spaces for women and girls such as classes for women learning Swedish as a foreign language in the community centre *Folkets Hus* (The People's House) and regular after school groups with girls aged 16 to 19 at *Framtidens Hus* (The House of the Future).



Case Study

Stockholms stad organises and manages a paid internship programme for young people aged 16–19 during school holidays. The programme provides the city with the resources to co-design public realm interventions, artwork or installations with young people

and provides them with design skills and access to careers in the built environment. In Järva alone, one of Stockholm municipality's 11 districts, over 2,600 young people were hired over the summer in 2024. Some of these interns co-designed and painted mural projects across the district, primarily targeting underpasses, tunnels and other pedestrian routes that bypass road infrastructure and had been identified as places people felt unsafe in.

Insights

1. A rise in violent crime has shaped women's feelings of safety in public spaces

Women and girls at the engagement sessions in both Rinkeby and Slussen regularly brought up a recent examples of gun violence in Stockholm as incidents that contributed to them feeling unsafe. In 2021, nine people were shot and killed in Järva, a district of only 92,659 people within which the centre of Rinkeby is located. This represents a gun murder rate of 9,7 per 100,000 residents. These incidents shocked the local community. Murders took place in public spaces and one officer at the municipality reflected that these incidents affected everyone in some way:

“It’s a small area and everyone knows someone that was killed – it lives with you”

In Rinkeby, a mother described the distressing impact of this violence on her as she worried for her sons when they were out in public spaces. The violence felt indiscriminate and random. She said that for her, and all mothers, she feels safe when children can be outside with friends without the risk of being shot or robbed.

In recent years, gun violence has spread to locations across the city. These trends have made women and girls more fearful of being in public spaces. These incidents have strengthened the calls for additional policing and security, sometimes at the expense of providing public amenities like public toilets which are framed as potential attractors of crime. A young woman in Slussen reflected that:

“There have been a lot of shootings around, and so we carry this sense that anything could happen - I would love to see a stronger security

presence so that I know someone would be able to act if anything happened.”

Similarly, another young person highlighted the positive impact of having visible security infrastructure in the form of CCTV along the new Slussbron in Slussen. She described feeling safer in the knowledge that if anything were to happen, it would be captured by CCTV. Other young people pointed to the positive impact of having an informal on-street presence in Slussen in the form of construction workers who passively overlook and manage the site. Participants at the workshop in Slussen wanted to see investments and interventions to bring these types of softer safety presences into public spaces once the scheme is fully delivered.

For many of the women and girls we spoke to, feeling unsafe in public spaces was a regular experience. The prospect of serious violence and danger feels close and constant. Women and girls live in the knowledge that something could happen at any moment. This heightened stress, anxiety and discomfort contrasts with the normalisation of these experiences. This was illustrated by a teenager describing an underpass in Slussen as somewhere she:

“feel[s] unsafe, but it doesn’t matter”

Women, girls and non-binary people can carry this sense that their fears, the inconveniences they face and their need to walk through spaces that don't feel safe to them do not matter and are normal. It is important to challenge the ways in which GBV in public spaces is normalised and clearly demonstrate the ways in which built environment projects have considered and addressed the everyday needs and experiences of women, girls and non-binary people.

When describing areas in Slussen that felt unsafe to them, some

of the younger women described a particular space as “looking like the scene of a horror movie”. This insight speaks to the ways in which the language and stories we use to describe certain places have a material impact on safety experiences in those spaces. It illustrates the need to tell different positive stories about places, particularly where those places may be stigmatised or deemed unsafe, to help people feel safer.

2. The co-design of public spaces with women, girls and non-binary people can improve their sense of safety and belonging

Planners and community safety officers already frequently engage with community organisations and residents in their districts. For example, the city has facilitated a series of *Områdesbaserade Dialoger* (neighbourhood dialogues) to understand what people think of their local areas. In Järva the neighbourhood dialogue found that strategies to improve perceptions of safety ranked highly among the identified priorities.

Alongside regular programmes of community dialogue, municipal community safety officers frequently organise neighbourhood safety walks. In Rinkeby, these walks happen twice a year and bring together residents, social workers, landowners and other stakeholders such as the police to discuss safety issues. Following the walk, the organisers write a report and assign actions for people responsible over specific places or pieces of public realm that were identified during the walks as being in need of attention. Progress on the delivery of these actions to address identified issues is reported on in six months’ time at the next safety walk. Recent projects, such as the improvement in Rinkeby to the Norra Stadsparken park, were first identified as being in need of investment during a safety walk. Developing a strong, community-led and participatory evidence base outlining the experiences of women, girls and non-binary people through safety walks can support the municipality to secure the investment to make improvements to public spaces.

Despite these successes, young people remain frequently

under-represented in community safety walks and other engagement activities. There is a need for planners and designers to reach more people and hear from different voices in

“We can be better at involving more and different people into our processes – we more or less always hear from the same people”

engagement exercises. One officer summarised this as: There was a recognition that more innovative methods could be used to reach and engage different audiences. In Slussen, one of the reflections from officers in the Södermalm district team was that the street tagging method, and the invitation it extended to women and girls to share their experiences and daily lives, created an engaging and dynamic session where other methods may have failed to elicit excitement from that audience.

One of the challenges reflected by the city was that too often their engagement processes result in ideas, recommendations or suggestions that are not possible to deliver. These outcomes reduce trust between community groups and the local government. The challenge is to ensure that people’s voices are meaningfully heard and that their ideas are taken forward and integrated into designs. One municipal planner reflected that:

“We’re very professionalised (...) we have formal processes and are highly educated and skilled. But we do things for people, not with them”

One approach to support professionals to move away from doing things for people, and bringing them into projects, is to use creative engagement methods early in projects to inform briefs and concept designs for public realm projects. Publica delivered a youth collage workshop in Rinkeby in partnership with *Framtidens Hus*, a recreation and youth centre, to re-image Rinkebytorget, a public space set to be redesigned by

Opportunities

1. Develop processes and methods in public realm design projects to give a voice and power to women, girls and non-binary people

Plan specific engagement programmes to hear directly from women, girls and non-binary people. Organise these as early in the project as possible and use findings to shape public realm briefs. Use creative and participative methods to understand lived experiences and, where possible, re-engage with the same group of participants multiple times to support them to review designs. Explore ways to share and transfer power to women, girls and non-binary peoples through tools such as participatory budgeting and co-clienting.

2. Use the holiday internship programmes to train young people to act as community researchers to inform the briefs of public realm projects and survey their neighbourhoods

Use the internship programme to provide young people with action research and built environment skills through a summer school. Invite young people to survey their neighbourhoods, gather data and study the use of public spaces through a gender lens. Support young people to get involved in and claim ownership of the construction and delivery of public realm improvements and interventions.

3. Work with architecture schools to build capacity and skills to use creative engagement methods in design projects

Work collaboratively with architecture schools to bring students into project teams to support them to develop skills and share methods to map and spatialise safety concerns in public spaces.

Case Studies



Image: CHANGE

International VAWG Summit

In April 2025, CHANGE hosted its first International Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Summit. The event brought together ten cities from four continents to address the global emergency of GBV. The summit kicked-off with opening remarks by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, who acknowledged the insufficient response to VAWG and urged participants to find new and more impactful solutions. Building on the CHANGE Mayoral Declaration Against VAWG, the summit featured discussions on the rise of anti-feminist policies, a keynote speech by Nairobi’s Deputy Governor James Njoroge Muchiri on his city’s health-based GBV strategy, and a presentation by Bogotá’s Secretary for Women, Laura Tami, on protecting women in politics. The summit included insights from Celine Rae Apollon from the World Bank on co-creating safe spaces across diverse cultural contexts and a workshop led by Equimundo on engaging men and boys in the prevention of violence.

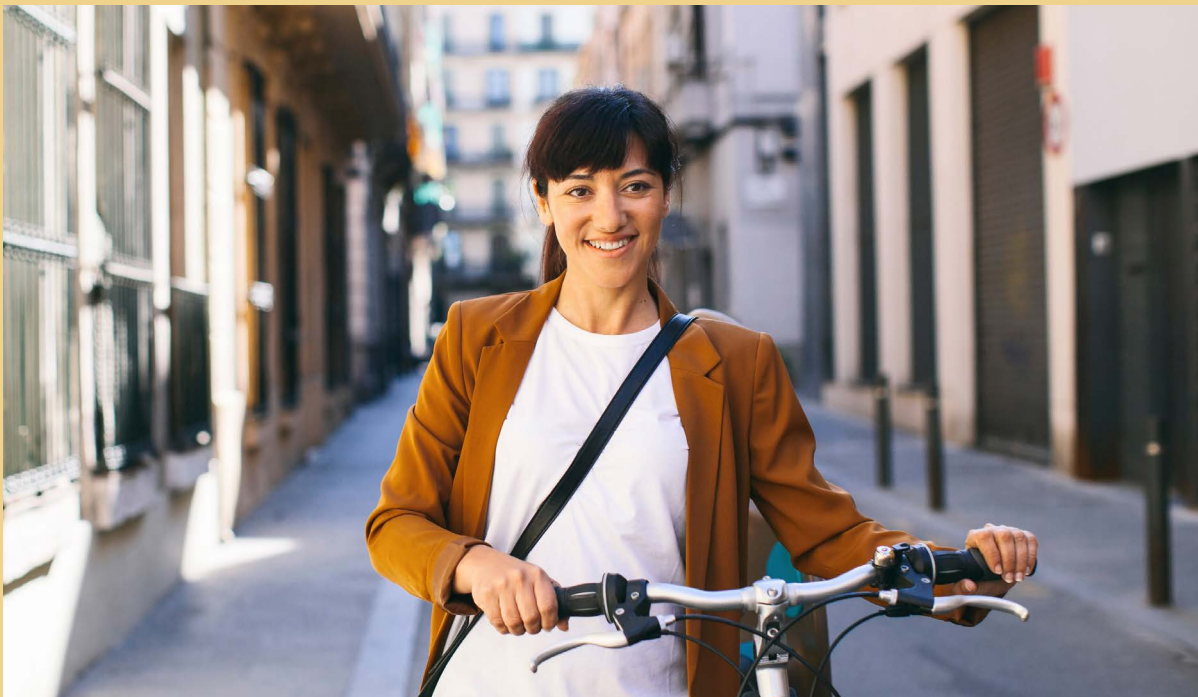


Image: City of Barcelona

Department for Gender Mainstreaming, Barcelona

The City of Barcelona set-up a Department of Gender Mainstreaming to promote the introduction of gender perspective into both the running and organisation of the City Council, and all the policies being implemented. At the same time, a parallel strategy also established specific different departments to lead its gender equity policies. This includes the fight against GBV, the promotion of women’s political and social participation, services on legal, psychological and community support, and gender equity awareness campaigns.



Image: Sanne Couprie

Sexual Violence Centre, Amsterdam

The first physical location of the Sexual Violence Centre in Amsterdam opened in 2024. Victims of sexual violence from the region now receive multi-disciplinary support in a single location. This support is provided by case managers, forensic physicians, victim advocates, and detectives, among others. Various organisations and initiatives can now collaborate more easily and effectively, creating greater coherence and ensuring victims of sexual violence receive faster and better support. The opening was accompanied by a physical and digital publicity campaign to help victims, loved ones and professionals find the physical centre.

Physical Environment

This chapter identifies the ways in which the design and maintenance of public spaces contribute to perceptions of safety and a sense of belonging for women, girls and non-binary people. It highlights the ways in which conflicts and safety trade-offs can be reconciled through the design process.

Existing assets

Stockholms stad is investing in new public spaces across the city. These range from the city's flagship, multi-year redevelopment of Slussen to investments in smaller public squares and open spaces in suburban centres. In Rinkeby, for example, recent years have seen the transformation of arterial roads into new commercial streets and new walking and cycling bridges connecting a previously disconnected neighbourhood to its surroundings. Large new housing developments and the expansion of the metro system are providing significant opportunities to invest in public spaces across the city.

These projects could consider the ways in which the design, programming and management of new public spaces support safety and a sense of belonging for women, girls and non-binary people. Some projects are already doing this by co-designing installations and public art with women and girls. However, there is scope to mainstream these approaches and more consistently consider all projects through a gender inclusive lens.

Planners, engineers and designers already consider the design and management of the public realm after dark and developers in Slussen are considering commercial ground floor activation programmes and strategies to ensure public spaces are overlooked by active frontages to their developments. Many principles of good urban design that support safety and a sense of belonging are consistently incorporated into the delivery of new high quality public realm schemes.



Case Study

Planning and transport officers in Rinkeby have worked closely with the municipal landscape design team, community safety officers and landscape architects Landskapslaget to co-design and activate a piece of poorly defined open space in Norra Stadsparken. The landscape designers opened a pop-up office

called *Gäris* (Swedish slang for Girls) in Rinkeby to work closely with women and girls from the area to design a pavilion and shelter structure for the park following extensive engagement. Engagement activities included safety walks and collage-making with girls to explore what the city would look like if it was built by girls. The women and girls expressed their desire for a space that could be theirs. Mothers and older children wanted somewhere they could sit and socialise while their children or younger siblings played nearby, leading to the design of the pavilion.

Insights

3. Co-design with women and girls is already happening but could be done consistently across all projects and at scale

Projects such as Norra Stadsparken demonstrate the value of engaging with women and girls to understand their needs in public spaces. The design process led directly to the delivery of spaces that women, girls and non-binary people can use and claim a sense of ownership over. There was a reflection from planners involved in the project that these types of engagement activities and installations can be fast-paced and agile compared to other longer-term planning transformations. Planning officers in central Södermalm reflected that these creative approaches to co-design are easier on smaller projects with smaller budgets and design teams working on sites with fewer constraints.

There are however opportunities in larger, longer-term projects such as Slussen to incorporate these co-design methodologies and small-scale interventions to more clearly signal that these large new spaces have been designed with women's needs in mind. It was suggested that the Slussen team could identify parts of the masterplan that remain unresolved or less clearly programmed and defined to work with social workers and young girls to design spaces for them to use and activate.

When speaking to local women and girls in Slussen, there was a sense from participants in the public realm street tagging workshops that the area would feel more welcoming if it included more art, play features and greenery. One participant described the area as feeling devoid of life, claiming that:

“The space needs something living”

Other participants used words such as ‘cold’, ‘industrial’ and ‘dead’ to describe the space, and suggested that they would feel more welcomed and experience more joy in the space if

it was more colourful. Young people in particular suggested installations like graffiti walls, mirrors installed in the public realm or rolling programmes of murals and public art to create a more welcoming space for them to spend time in. Current temporary installations, such as hoarding for the construction site, could also be used to add colour to the area. Participants in the workshops identified a missed opportunity where hoarding fronting new public spaces along Vatten Torg (the water square) included black and white line drawings rather than a more colourful piece of artwork. Elsewhere in the area, women noted that a large aerial image of the Stockholm archipelago displayed along a wall of one of the tunnels through the site made them feel at home. Despite the advanced stage of the project, there may be opportunities to explore the co-design of specific features of the public realm to address these concerns.

Inviting women, girls, non-binary people and other marginalised people and groups into the design process earlier could also allow for more fundamental changes to the design of public spaces. Issues such as the layout and arrangement of sites, the provision of public toilets, the co-location of facilities and services such as care providers could be considered and thought about from the outset of a project.

4. The management of public spaces and amenities, such as passageways and public toilets, present challenges to planners

Across various new developments and public realm schemes, spaces such as underpasses, tunnels and public toilets present challenges for the management and maintenance of sites. In Slussen, these tensions were particularly present in the management of a new gallery space connecting the future underground bus terminal to a shopping centre. Planned as an open public route with 24-hour access, the space is currently designed as a retail parade with shops occupying the commercial premises overlooking the covered indoor space. The local police and transport safety coordinators have identified this space as one that needs particular attention to promote safety in the arcade at night, once the shops have closed. There is an

assumption and fear that the space, if left unmanaged and open at night, could feel unsafe to move through or provide a sheltered space for drug users or other anti-social behaviour.

Although the space has already been identified as challenging, and stakeholders such as the developer and owner of the space, local and transport police and local municipality community

“For the route to be closed at night”

safety coordinators have met to discuss the area, there remains uncertainty about how to manage the space effectively. One transport police officer stated that their preference would be: Strategies that seek to close or limit the use of public spaces after dark may limit the permeability and ease of movement through the city at night. It may remove the use of an indoor amenity that might otherwise, if well managed, provide a safer and more pleasant indoor place to meet and use after dark.

These tensions also apply to the provision of public toilets. The Slussen development does not provide new public toilets, other than two toilets in the underground bus terminal. Public toilets are currently framed as spaces that are only used by drug users and become difficult and expensive to manage and maintain. The lack of public toilets in the public realm was commented on by participants during the workshop in Slussen and this omission, alongside the lack of play spaces, were viewed by participants as contributing to the perception that the space is designed to move through rather than as a place to dwell with children or spend time in. In both cases, the design and management of the space is contributing to the removal of public life from these new developments and the people tasked with managing the space do not have power to shape design decisions. These types of safety trade-offs are not uncommon in large public realm projects and municipal officers recognised the need to address these issues as the Slussen project nears completion. There was a recognition from the Södermalm district team for example that they will likely install public toilets in the future.

Elsewhere in the city, officers reflected that the budgets to maintain public spaces do not increase in line with the delivery of new public spaces. Additional funding for districts identified by the city as priority areas for public realm and safety improvements is limited to capital investments to deliver public realm schemes. These new pieces of public realm or enhanced public amenities require additional upkeep and maintenance but budgets for these expenditures do not rise at a rate to meet these new and additional costs. Planning officers in the training workshop reflected that the maintenance of a space is fundamental to the sense of safety and belonging people feel in that space. There is an opportunity to more consistently invest in maintenance plans to address these challenges.

5. Cycling infrastructure may cause conflicts in public spaces

Some of the women and girls involved in the engagement events suggested that the incorporation of cycling infrastructure into the public realm design of Slussen was contributing to hostile spaces for pedestrians. Many of the cycle routes are level with pedestrian routes with little to segregate between users and very few crossing points for pedestrians seeking to walk across cycle lanes. One participant suggested that the new public

*“Has not been designed for pedestrians.
Cycleways are the dominant feature of
the space”*

spaces would not be safe for families or young children. Another highlighted that pedestrian desire lines did not align with crossing points, suggesting that the space:

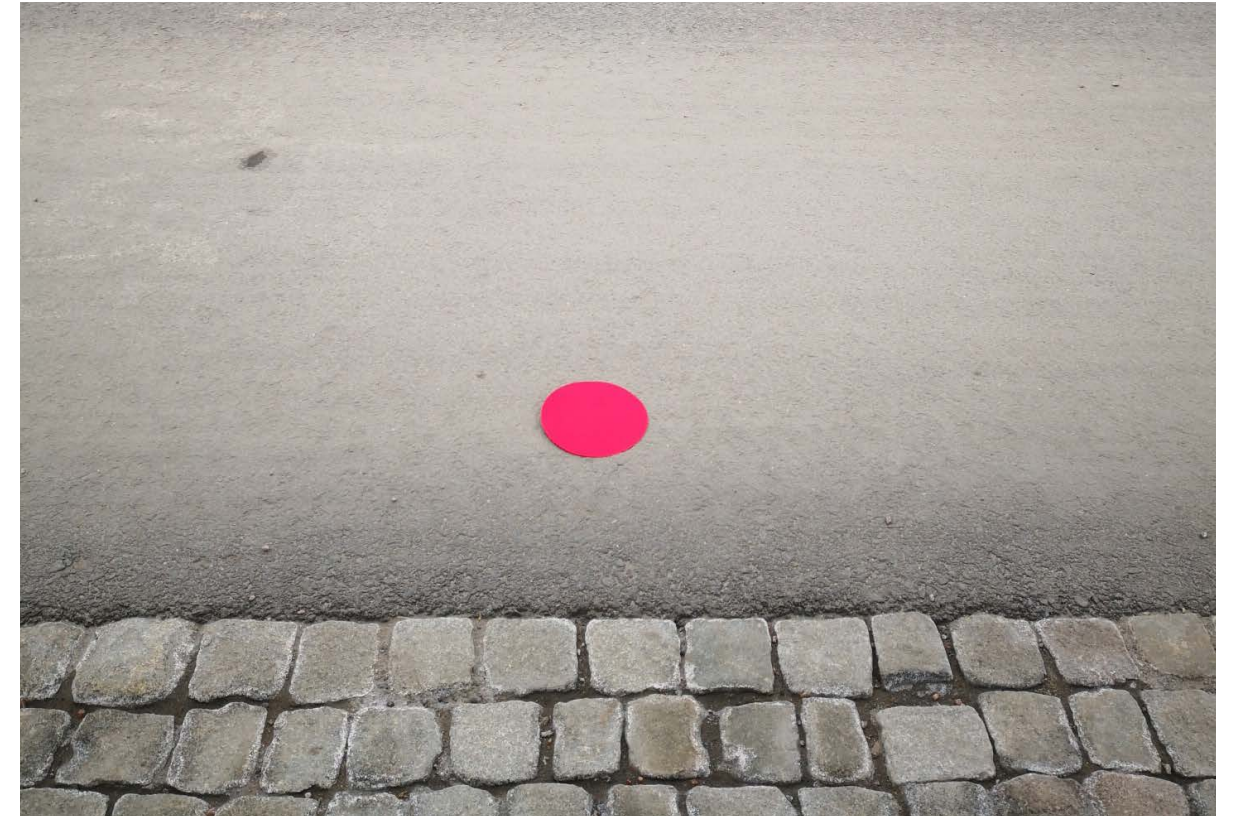
On Södermalmstorg, the large new public space, the current cycle lane design bisects the public space with cyclists crossing the square to connect to a new cycling and walking bridge. The design of the cycleway was seen as reducing the scale of public spaces delivered as part of the scheme, creating two smaller, less generous public spaces and prioritising cycling routes. There was a sense among local residents that the public space was now less able to accommodate and host social and public events or

act as an effective site of protest. Opportunities for events, large outdoor gatherings and markets are also contingent on potential points of conflict between users being managed and cyclists being more clearly segregated from pedestrians. Signage and road markings could also be reviewed to more clearly distinguish between routes pedestrians are supposed to take and those they should avoid.

When designing cycling infrastructure, it is important to consider the ways in which that infrastructure serves men and women differently and impacts cycling culture more broadly. In general, women make more frequent but shorter journeys than men and they are more likely to make shopping trips and trips with children, particularly escorting them to school. There may therefore be a preference for infrastructure to support these types of journeys such as wider lanes to allow parents to cycle alongside children or the closure of school streets to traffic during drop-off and pick-up times.

Promoting cycling can support efforts to reduce air pollution, improve independent child mobility and activity rates, reduce transport costs and give people freedom to move through the city. However, feeling safe while cycling is a significant consideration and determining factor, particularly for women. Cycling infrastructure that is deemed to heighten the risks of collisions, between cyclists and pedestrians for example, will deter people from cycling. One older workshop participant in Slussen reflected that she had stopped cycling in the city centre in recent years due to the stress of passing through spaces such as Slussen where the high volume of pedestrians and cyclists becomes difficult to navigate.

Infrastructure should be designed to support cyclist safety, accommodate a wide variety of bicycle and journey types and support cycling with children at lower speeds to create an environment that supports women's independent mobility.



Material changes alone between bicycle paths and pedestrian routes were seen as dangerous, particularly for groups such as children and people with visual impairments



Participants want to see temporary hoarding bring more colour to public spaces

Opportunities

1. Continue to engage with the girls and young women in Rinkeby to bring them into the Rinkebytorget project as it moves through the design and construction phase

Formally invite the group of girls in Rinkeby to act as critical friends for the Rinkebytorget project and allow them to review the project design and feed into the design of social spaces for them, building on the learnings from the Norra Stadsparken project.

2. Co-design public spaces with local women, girls and non-binary people

Work with the Slussen project team to identify spaces or sites where design issues remain unresolved or ill-defined and where temporary structures, events or interventions could be deployed and co-designed with women and girls.

3. Explore opportunities to secure public access to toilets and changing rooms in Slussen

Consider introducing a community toilet scheme or similar to more actively signpost and promote where toilets may be available to use by the public. Start by considering the feasibility of providing toilet access to the public at Slussenrummet.

4. Identify potential evening and night time occupiers for the indoor gallery space that will extend opening hours and provide passive surveillance of the space and explore the use of public art, lighting installations or sound recordings to improve perceptions of safety

Consider opportunities for a night time social or creative tenant to occupy a unit in the covered commercial space. Work with an artist or creative to test and implement strategies to improve perceptions of safety. This could include playful use of light at night when shops have closed, playing music, sounds or spoken word through speakers or installing interactive art installations to signal that the space has been considered, invested in and thought about as a public space at night.

5. Invest in maintenance and management plans for public spaces

Allocate additional resources to secure the long-term maintenance of public spaces, particularly when these have been recently delivered.

Case Studies



Image: Quezon City

Violence Against Women and Anti Sexual Harassment Desk Officers, Quezon City

Every *barangay* – the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines – in Quezon City has a dedicated Violence Against Women (VAW) desk where individuals can report GBV and access support services. Some *barangays* also have an Anti-Sexual Harassment (ASH) Desk Officer for harassment cases. VAW desks assist victims in securing Barangay Protection Orders, respond to GBV cases, maintain confidential records and submit quarterly reports to national and local government. They develop gender-responsive plans, coordinate with government agencies and NGOs, address abuse against marginalised women and lead community advocacy to eliminate VAW. In Quezon City, VAW/ASH Desk Officers are active partners of the city-level Gender and Development (GAD) office, participating in quarterly meetings and contributing to advocacy campaigns and programme implementation on VAW.

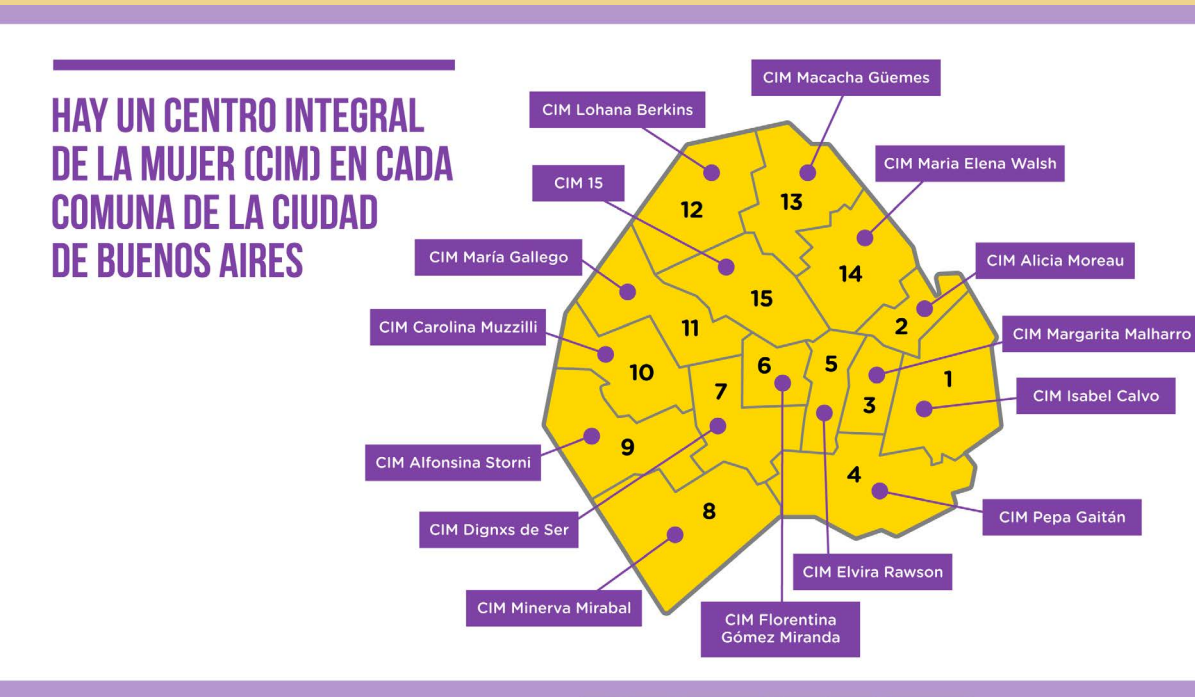


Image: Buenos Aires

Women’s Centres, Buenos Aires

The *Centro Integral de la Mujer* (CIM - Comprehensive Women’s Centres) are community-based facilities that provide support, guidance and professional assistance to women and children facing domestic violence. They offer safe and accessible environments that combine legal, social, and psychological resources to reduce risks, restore rights and promote autonomy. The care process unfolds in four stages:

- 1. First contact and risk assessment:** entry through various channels, initial interview, and activation of the multi-disciplinary team
- 2. Action plan:** psychological support, social assistance and legal representation
- 3. Support networks:** group sessions with trusted relatives and peers to strengthen collective strategies
- 4. Restoration of rights:** workshops and programmes that foster economic independence and help rebuild a life free from violence



Image: Mama Lucy Hospital

Tumaini Clinics, Nairobi

Nairobi City County has developed a multi-sectoral approach to tackle GBV rooted in coordinated response, survivor support and institutional reform. Under Governor Sakaja’s administration, the county established “Tumaini Clinics” across 46 public health facilities, offering psychosocial care, forensic support and legal referrals. The programme is led by GBV champions in each sub-county. The City County is also constructing a new safe house and scaling up operations at the Kayola Girls Centre, a historic rehabilitation facility now being adapted to serve as a shelter for women and girls escaping GBV violence.



Image: All gender restroom in Taipei

Women and gender-friendly restrooms, Taipei

Since 2000, Taipei has improved public restroom access by increasing the ratio of women’s toilet stalls in response to concerns about long wait times. Design guidelines were revised to achieve a minimum 3:1 ratio of female to male stalls in key public venues. Between 2011 and 2016, Taipei improved the women-to-men stall ratio from 1:1 to approximately 2.3:1. In parallel, Taipei pioneered gender-inclusive restrooms. In 2013, the city introduced Taiwan’s first all-gender facility in a government building, followed by a comprehensive “All Gender Restroom” policy. By 2024, 114 public restrooms included gender-friendly designs. These restrooms emphasise safety, inclusivity, accessibility, and flexibility—especially for caregivers, children, and the elderly. The city also maintains an online map for public use.

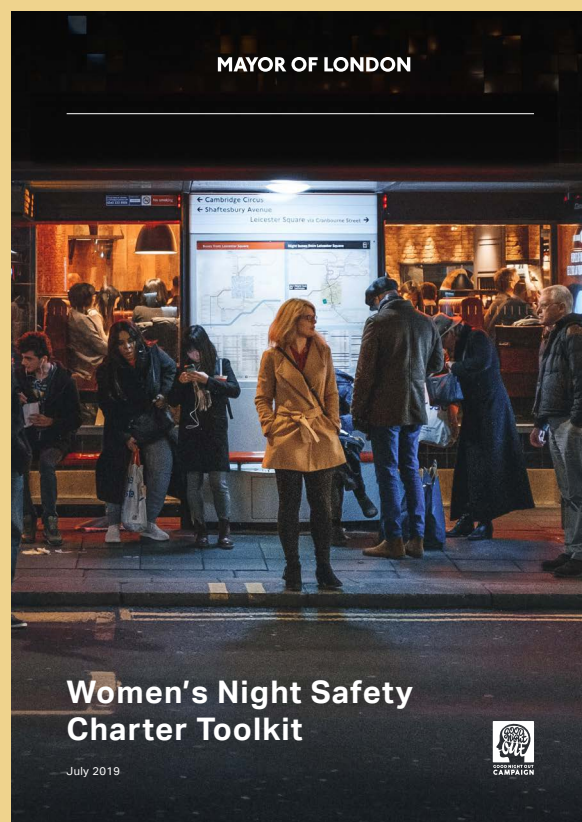


Image: Mayor of London

Women's Night Safety Charter

The Women's Night Safety Charter is a voluntary charter first introduced in London to encourage businesses to support the safety of women at night. The charter includes a series of pledges that organisations commit to. These pledges include nominating a women's night safety champion in the business, informing customers as to what they can do if they are concerned about their safety, providing regular staff training around women's safety and committing to designing the venue and premises, as well as any outdoor public space around the business, to support the safety of women. The charter, which has over 2,000 signatories, has since been adopted in cities around the UK and internationally.

Policy and Organisations

This chapter explores the ways in which policies and how projects are organised, governed and delivered can support the mainstreaming of women's safety into all public realm projects.

Existing assets

There is strong leadership from the Executive Office of the city to integrate crime prevention and safety considerations into all public realm designs and planning processes. The mainstreaming of safety considerations is supported by the city's governance with municipal district teams embedding community safety and crime prevention officers in each of the city's 11 districts. These officers meet regularly to share progress and report quarterly on their action plans.

The city's safety strategy identifies the design of public spaces and planning policies as two of the four priority focus areas for improving safety in the city. Policies already recognise the important role the physical environment plays to support feelings of safety and belonging and departments across the city are reporting on the actions they are taking to meet these priority goals. The strategy also identifies four spatial priority areas where funding will be targeted to support public realm and safety interventions.

Case Study

The city's safety plan and strategy identifies four priority areas of focus where additional funding and investment will be directed towards over the current mayoral term. The neighbourhoods of Kista-Järva, Skärholmen, Farsta and Hagsätra-Rågsved have received additional support to invest in public spaces



and improve community safety and crime prevention efforts. Officers from Kista-Järva reflected on the ways in which the additional resource was supporting closer collaborative working between transport, highways, landscape, planning and community safety departments. Despite being based in offices and departments spread geographically across the city, one officer reflected that they worked much more closely with the area-based cross-departmental team in Kista-Järva than with their colleagues in the same department. The identification of focus areas and the added investment in place-based solutions supported the development of networks of officers and stakeholders and the delivery of public realm improvements such as new open spaces, landscaped play spaces and public art installations in tunnels.

Insights

6. The complexity of large infrastructure projects and complex governance reduces collaboration on women's safety and crime prevention

Decision-making processes and the project management of large-scale projects are complex. In Slussen, for example, the *Exploateringskontoret* (development office) is the overall project lead for the scheme, with responsibility for delivering the masterplan. Once delivered, the design and management of the streets and transport infrastructure will be the responsibility of *Trafikkontoret* (the transport authority), and the management of events and the public realm will lie with the Södermalm district team at the municipality alongside the police and transport police. Although these stakeholders already meet regularly to coordinate their strategies, officers from the district team expressed concerns that they had not been given a chance to input into the masterplan or shape the design according to their planned approaches for managing the public spaces.

“We have to invite ourselves to the party (...) we will be the ones that have to live with these decisions and manage the space.”

Officers were unsure of where water or electricity points would be located for events or how queues for market stalls would be managed for example. Crime prevention measures, such as hostile vehicle mitigation measures, have not yet been considered and there was a recognition from the local district team that the design of the space would need to be adjusted or temporarily addresses once the scheme is delivered and use patterns can be studied.

Officers from across the city reflected that safety and crime prevention considerations could more consistently and formally be considered at the outset of public realm projects. Professionals involved in the Slussen project reflected that

the design and delivery of the space had not previously been considered through a gender lens. There is an opportunity to include these considerations into project briefs, design reviews and the delivery of schemes. Public realm projects would benefit from clear commitments and actions to design the spaces with consideration given to the safety of women, girls and gender diverse people. Community safety teams and the people with responsibility for managing public spaces should be engaged with early to scope opportunities for safety interventions.

There is a strong case to be made that more collaborative design approaches that bring the eventual managers of a new space into design conversations would mitigate the risk of having to redesign elements of the public realm once delivered and studied. Many of the new features installed in Slussen are not flexible or temporary and the redesign of any features post-completion may be costly. Complex, long-term projects such as these would benefit from having a named person leading on safety and crime prevention to attend design review meetings and input into design decisions.

7. There is not widespread understanding of the role city planning and urban activation programmes can play to create gender inclusive spaces

Safety interventions in public spaces are often limited to investments in security infrastructure such as additional CCTV and police presence. However, when discussing the aspects of a public space that made them feel safe, attendees at the built environment training workshop considered a wider set of possible tools including community events, passive surveillance, greenery, signage, public transport and pedestrian infrastructure. A focus on supporting women, girls and non-binary people to feel a sense of belonging in public spaces promotes a wider range of potential interventions. Community safety officers in Södermalm recognise the value of these approaches and work closely with planning and placemaking colleagues to deliver activities and events to improve perceptions of safety but noted a lack of resources to implement community-based safety initiatives or invest in preventative safety work:

“Everyone in theory has responsibility over safety but we all have very different tools and budgets to act on these priorities — there is less funding available for preventative work”

Planning officers also noted that the built fabric of Stockholm presented challenges. Some residential streets and neighbourhoods are difficult to activate or draw public life to. For example, the layout and design of suburban centres in particular creates stark differences between commercial cores with transport connections and streets of residential blocks with very little ground floor activity, informal overlooking or street life. In some cases, these suburbs also contain tunnels, underpasses and densely forested areas, which further contribute to spaces that feel inactive, isolated and potentially dangerous. One woman in Rinkeby specifically noted that she avoided forested areas in her neighbourhood and feared the encounters she might have in that space with nobody around to support her if anything happened.

Safety approaches and interventions in the city therefore need to find ways to make these types of spaces feel more welcoming. Mural and public art programmes are already targeting underpasses and tunnels, and community safety walks are helping officers to identify these spaces and direct investment to places identified by residents as feeling unsafe.

8. Businesses and commercial operators can play an important role in promoting women’s safety, particularly at night

Where streets and public spaces are overlooked by active ground floors and commercial premises, women and girls participating in the engagement events expressed a preference for moving away from leasing these spaces to retailers and venues that primarily sell alcohol. Instead, they supported more inclusive, child-friendly, and affordable options. The importance of providing indoor covered social spaces was noted by built environment professionals as an important safety strategy that planners and urban designers should consider.

Approaches to improve the safety of women, girls and non-binary people in public space can also extend to the ways in which local partners engage with one another, collaborate and share information. For example, stakeholders in Slussen discussed the fact that the area is set to become a new and emerging nightlife cluster and identified opportunities to encourage businesses to jointly support an area-wide safety action plan. The ambition is to encourage better coordination between businesses and create a shared sense of responsibility with joint commitments to manage public spaces and their venues in ways that promote women’s safety. These networks of businesses can also be used to communicate and disseminate safety campaigns, information and training for staff to recognise and intervene safely when they witness sexual harassment.

When describing places that feel safe to them, participants at the engagement workshops all suggested that seeing people like them and a diversity of people out in public helped them feel safer as it signals that the space is for someone like them. It is therefore worth considering the diversity of venues and businesses that will remain open at night in Slussen and exploring opportunities to extend the opening hours of non-alcohol-led businesses such as retailers, community spaces or cafés to support a wide range of people to be out at night. Other approaches could support night time businesses to trial and test programmes of activities that make their venues accessible to people that may otherwise feel excluded, unwelcome or face barriers to accessing social spaces at night. This could include discounted activities to support lower income people, specific nights that make accommodations to welcome disabled people and carers or events that target women and non-binary people specifically.

Opportunities

1. Identify women's safety leads for every public realm project

Nominate and name a women's safety lead for all public realm projects. Ensure this person has the skills and capacity to oversee design discussions that relate to women's safety and to organise and facilitate engagement with a range of women with a variety of lived experiences.

2. Convene public space management teams early in the design of projects to feed into the design

Convene stakeholder groups with the people responsible for managing, programming and maintaining new public spaces and ensure they feed into the brief for the public space and attend key project design reviews. Ensure that women's safety is included in discussions and considerations.

3. Bring businesses into partnerships to develop local safety action plans or a women's safety charter

Explore opportunities to convene business groups, particularly those operating at night, into local safety networks to coordinate actions. Develop training for businesses and a charter or accreditation scheme to acknowledge and support businesses to adopt best practices.

4. Support a range of businesses to open later

Explore options to test and pilot night time diversification grants to support a wider range of businesses to open later and activate public places at night.

Case Studies



Image: Louisville Office for Women Ambassadors

Office for Women Ambassadors, Louisville

The Office for Women (OFW) Ambassadors is a six-month training programme for women and gender diverse individuals who represent diverse communities across Metro Louisville. Through the programme, participants develop and hone their leadership skills, learn about issues impacting women and explore government and community programmes available to women. The OFW Ambassadors serve as community liaisons, sharing information about vital community services and communicating back to government about the needs of women in their communities.



Image: SD Mujer

Duos, Bogotá

In Bogotá, the Secretariat of Women’s Affairs (SD Mujer) supports women facing harassment in public spaces and on public transport through its psycho-legal support *Duos*. Since 2020, these pairs—comprising a lawyer and a psychologist or social worker—have guided victims through justice processes and offered psychosocial support. Between January and April 2024, 388 women received assistance.



Image: City of Melbourne

Project Night Justice, Melbourne

Project Night Justice was a two-year project funded by the Victorian Government's Building Safer Communities Programme. It aimed to improve the safety and inclusion of women and gender-diverse people at night by working on a range of initiatives with late night venues. Included in the programme was a campaign to encourage bystanders to step up and speak up to help stop sexual violence against women and gender diverse people at night.

Cultural Norms

This chapter explores the ways in which gender-based violence is understood by built environment professionals and the extent to which public realm design teams feel able to consider women’s safety in their projects.

Existing assets

The city has published, and reports on, a public safety and crime prevention strategy and action plan. Considerations for the safety of women, girls and non-binary people in public spaces have been mainstreamed into public realm projects through the City’s comprehensive plan (*Översikts Plan*), which states that engagement for projects should “identify needs and opportunities for creating a more gender equal urban environment”. City policies and strategies are already using urban development processes to address safety issues and GBV in public spaces.

Insights

9. Gender equality is seen as something that has been largely ‘fought for and won’

Municipal planning officers reflected on the fact that the relatively high levels of equality between men and women in Sweden reduced the extent to which public realm design teams felt able to, or encouraged to, centre the voices, experiences and needs of women in their research and design projects. One officer reflected that:

“We think that we are almost done with gender equality (...) it is not seen as something we do now but is something we did in the seventies and things are good enough now. There is pressure not to be annoying about this and there are other priorities on projects. Now it’s climate or the environment that projects prioritise.”

Public realm designers and built environment professionals do not necessarily consider the opportunities for the design, programming and management of public spaces to support the safety of women, girls and non-binary people.

However, there remain clearly identified disparities between men and women when it comes to experiences of sexual harassment and safety in public spaces. Stockholms stad disseminates and analyses an anonymous crime survey of young people aged between 15 and 18 every two years. The latest survey in 2024 reached 12,766 year 9 and 11 students, aged between 15 and 18. It represents the 12th time the survey has been run spanning 26 years and provides an analysis of young people’s experiences of crime over time. The data finds that 12% of female year 9 students (aged 15 and 16) and 14% of upper secondary year 11

SL Security Center

Chat with SL Security Center during ongoing violence, threatening behavior and vandalism or other security concerns. Always call 112 in case of emergency. [Read about how we process your personal data here.](#)

Location / Where are you?

Are you on board the bus/train/boat right now?

* Type your message here...

Case Study

The regional transport authority, *Storstockholms Lokaltrafik* (SL), has rolled out a text-based reporting system across their public transport network.

The system allows people to text a number and report dangerous, inappropriate or harassing behaviour. The data shows that sexual offences are more frequently reported via this method, allowing people to report directly during incidents where moving away to make a call may not be possible or may feel unsafe.

female students (aged 17 and 18) responded yes to the question “Have you, in the last 12 months, been subjected to sexual acts against your will (e.g. someone groped or touched you in a sexual way even though you didn’t want to)?” compared to 4% and 2% of boys respectively. The research also finds that over one in four girls (26% for year 9 and 27% for year 11) feel unsafe in their neighbourhood compared to 14% of year 9 and year 11 boys.

These everyday experiences of insecurity in public spaces suggest that there is scope to more clearly articulate the need for every public realm project to consider women’s safety and identify opportunities to intervene. Project leaders should be commissioning research and requiring design teams and practitioners to more formally and systematically include the voices of women, girls and non-binary people in their engagement and design processes. There is a need for these new methods, skills and approaches to be shared with architecture and urban design students and emerging practitioners.

Public realm projects and data collection should also more explicitly take an intersectional lens and seek out the experiences of marginalised women including migrant women, women who do not speak Swedish, unemployed women, non-binary people and racialised women. There may be a need to provide guidance to support built environment professionals to adopt these practices in their projects and outline what effective engagement with these groups should look like and consider.

Opportunities

- 1. Disaggregate survey data according to different characteristics including race, ethnicity, employment status or disability to understand how safety experiences differ across groups of women**

There is an opportunity to collect better data about the ways in which women's safety needs and experiences differ according to intersecting identities. This should inform the types of interventions that are funded, priority areas to target and support the inclusion of, and engagement with, those that feel most unsafe and marginalised.

- 2. Formalise a process to ensure all public spaces should be designed to support women's safety and explore opportunities to get project teams to report and be monitored on their commitments**

Explore opportunities to establish women's safety as a cross-cutting principles that every large public realm project, public procurement or programme needs to make a commitment to supporting. This should recognise that gender equity should be planned and mainstreamed into all projects and that public spaces are experienced differently according to a person's gender identity. Designate a gender inclusion and safety lead for all projects. Convene project leads to enable knowledge exchanges and support coordinated actions.

Provide guidance to design teams to support them to make practical commitments, such as conducting specific research and engagement with women, girls and non-binary people or bringing together community panels to bring their voices into the project.

Case Studies

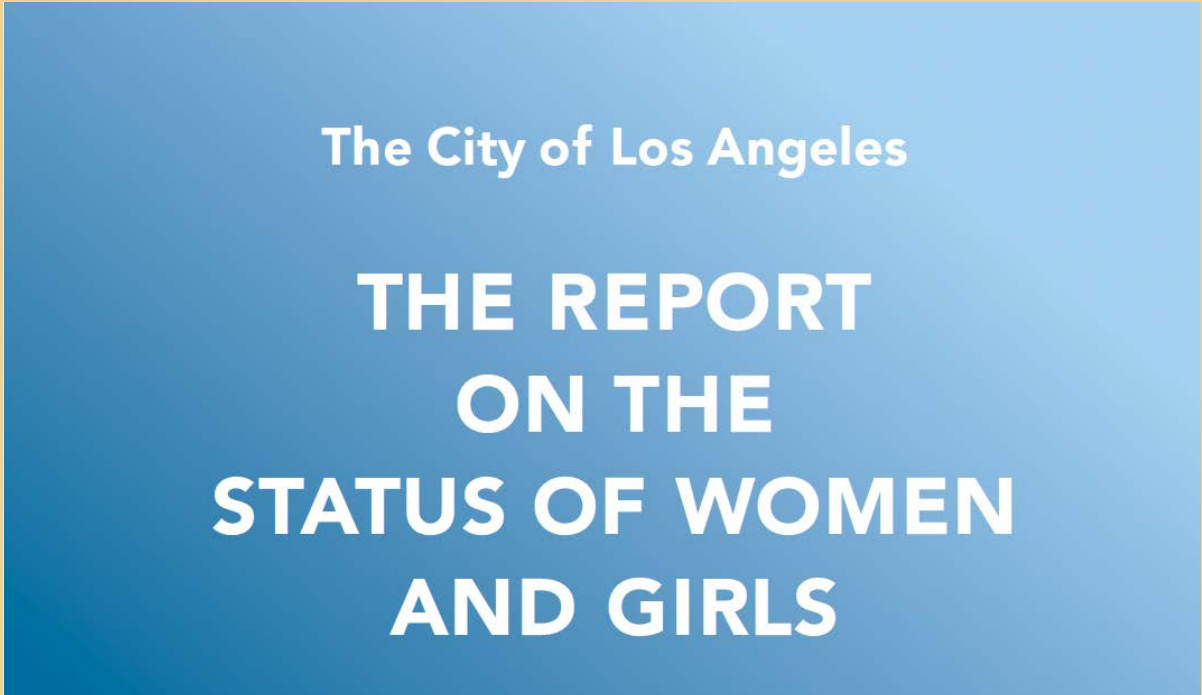
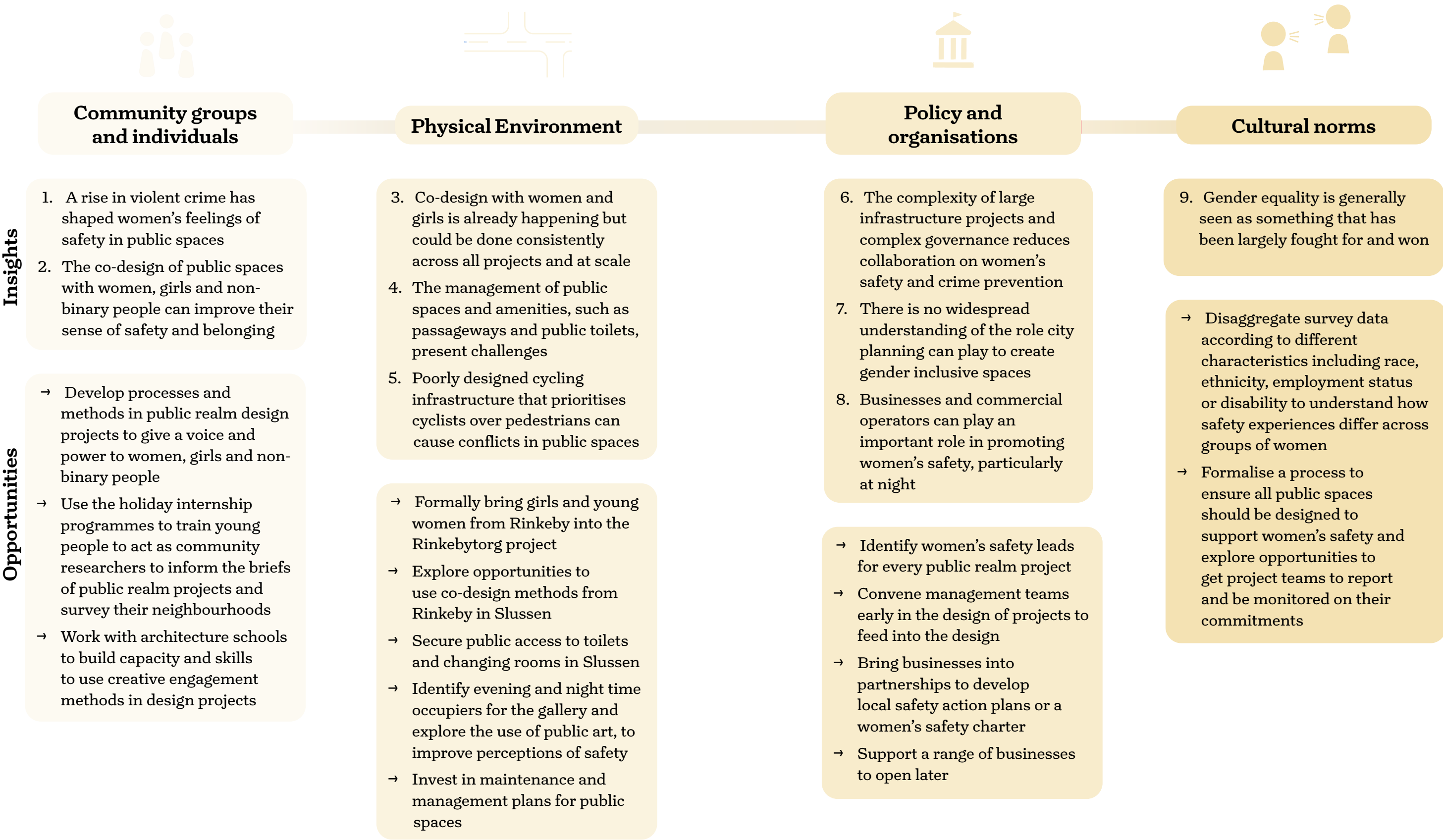
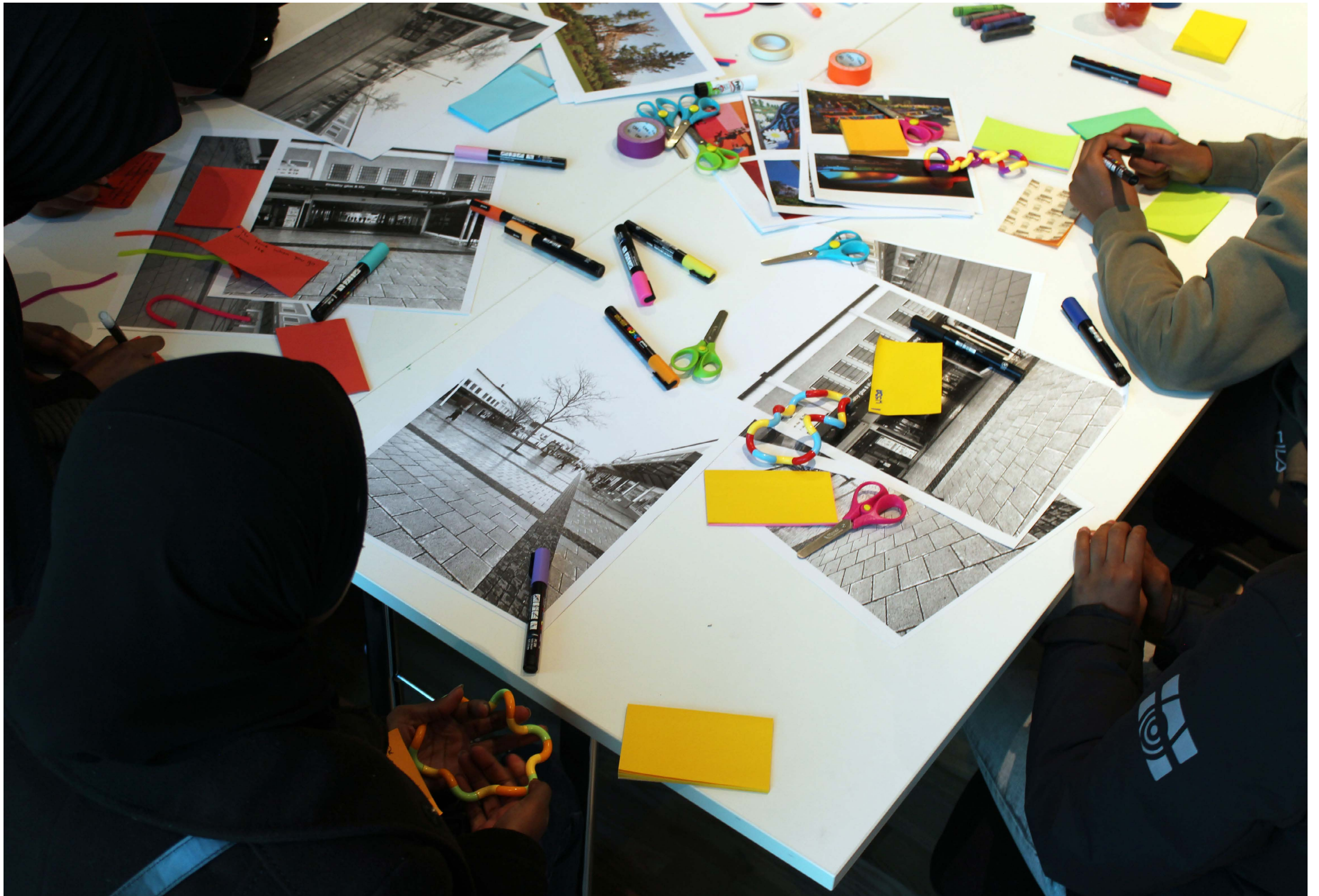


Image: City of Los Angeles

Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Los Angeles
The City of Los Angeles partnered with a local university—Mount Saint Mary’s—to produce the first-ever report on the status of women and girls in Los Angeles. The five-part report looked at a broad range of issues, including gender inequality in employment and wages, and sought to identify barriers that make it more challenging for women to reach their full potential. The report provided the data necessary for the City of Los Angeles to establish a broad range of interventions aimed at eliminating gender inequality including a gender equity toolkit and gender equity action plans.

Summary of key findings and opportunities





Acknowledgements and thanks

Hanna Larsson Werle
Lina Ploug
Malin Jansson
Maria Kearsley
Peter Lind
Sara Svalander

Written and produced by

Lou Elena Bouey
Daniel Blyth
Ellie Cosgrave
Gaia Crocella
James Lee
Greer Lockyear
Tess McCann
Lucy Musgrave



Support for this research was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

This report was produced by Publica on behalf of the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE). CHANGE commissioned and supported the project, connecting Publica with its international network of cities and partners. Together, CHANGE and Publica are working to advance new standards for gender-inclusive urban design and to create cities where women, girls, and people of all gender identities can thrive.

This publication and its contents are © Publica 2025. All rights reserved. Publica retains all intellectual property (IP) rights and copyright associated with this work, as set out in Publica’s terms and conditions. Further publication or use will require copyright usage approval. Contact Publica for further information.

The contents of this report include fieldwork and desk-based research undertaken in March 2025. All photographs and drawings by Publica unless otherwise noted. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and obtain permission for the use of copyrighted material. The publisher apologises for any omissions and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future revisions and editions of this report.

