

## Briefing Note – For Information

Date: May 14, 2019

### UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Flagship Programme

#### Issue

Fear and experiences of sexual violence<sup>1</sup>—from street level harassment to femicide—is a pervasive and long-standing issue. It happens on streets, parks, transit, workplaces, and homes and can deeply impact women and girls’ ability to participate fully and equally in public life, restricting mobility, and access to essential services, education, employment and recreation.

Participation in the UN Women’s Programme will position the municipality and its partners to create gender-responsive, locally relevant interventions to the problem of sexual violence that advances and enhances the implementation of the municipality’s Public Safety Strategy (2018-2022).

#### Background and Rationale

In 2013, the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women identified various forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces as a distinct area of concern and called on governments to prevent it. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set “the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres” as one of its specific goals (Target 5.2).

The municipality’s [Public Safety Strategy](#) (2018-2022), unanimously approved by Regional Council, heeds this call to prevent and respond to sexual violence. Specifically, the strategy demands that we:

- Assist youth to develop skills to recognize, avoid and deal with dating violence, gender violence and unhealthy relationships (Action 17).
- Help children/youth develop skills to recognize, avoid and deal with situations that may put them at risk of sexual abuse (Action 18).
- Address underage drinking, fake ID, violence, vandalism and sexual acts connected to licensed establishments (Action 66).
- Work to change environmental factors and social norms known to contribute to gendered violence (sexism, media and marketing practices, technology, harmful use of alcohol, etc.) (Action 74)
- Support initiatives that encourage bystanders to act to prevent gendered violence, abuse and neglect (action 75).

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual violence is a broad term that describes behaviours and actions that are sexual in nature and are unwanted, coerced, and committed without consent.

Prepared by Amy Siciliano, Public Safety Advisor, HRM

[sicilia@halifax.ca](mailto:sicilia@halifax.ca) 902.490.4177

- Employ victim centred approaches to the sexual exploitation of youth and children and facilitate exit strategies for victims of the sex trade and human trafficking (action 76).
- Facilitate services and supports for gendered violence survivors and perpetrators that are flexible, responsive, and timely (action 77).

The strategy's emphasis on sexual violence builds on [Clairemont's 2014 Roundtable Review](#), and other evidence that soundly demonstrates the gravity of the issue:

- Nearly 90% of sexual assaults occur against women and girls (Nova Scotia. Department of Community Service, 2019), and one in three women in Canada will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime ([General Social Survey 2014, Victimization, 2015](#)).
- Youth ages 15-24, Indigenous, racialized and other marginalized women are at a greater risk for sexual violence ([General Social Survey 2014, Victimization, 2015](#)).
- Between 1997-2015, 90 females were victims of femicide in Nova Scotia, an average of 5 each year ([Canadian Observatory of Femicide, 2019](#)).
- In Halifax, there is an average of one sexual assault reported to police each day, yet this number only scratches the surface as victims/survivors of sexual assault are less likely to report to police than other crimes (only 1 of 5 are reported) ([Avalon Centre, 2019](#)).

While disturbing, these statistics don't fully reveal the impact. Survivors of sexual violence often have negative perceptions of their neighbourhood, hold lower levels of trust in others, and less confidence in police. They report heightened feelings of fear, anger, confusion and frustration. A quarter of survivors have difficulty carrying out everyday activities ([Statistics Canada, 2017](#)).

Several high-profile cases of sexual violence in recent years have fuelled a growing awareness of its prevalence. Social movements such as the [#MeToo](#) campaign have encouraged more survivors to report incidents and access services:

- In 2016-2017 Halifax's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program (SANE), experienced its highest caseload in its history; a 68% increase over the previous year (Avalon Centre, 2018). The Centre is experiencing an unprecedented demand for its services, and in April of 2019, this overload forced it to freeze the waiting list ([Chronicle Herald 2019](#)).
- Halifax police-reported incidents of level one sexual assaults (by far the most common type reported to police), increased 21% between 2016-2017 ([Statistics Canada, 2018](#)).
- Across Canada, police-reported sexual assaults in 2017 were higher than in any year since 1998 ([Statistics Canada, 2018](#)).

## Discussion

UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Flagship Programme launched in November 2010. Since

then, several cities across the world have joined the programme, including: Vancouver, Dublin, London (UK), Madrid, Cape Town, Quito, Mexico City, Bogota, among others. In Canada, both Edmonton and Winnipeg participate jointly with their provincial Status of Women bureaus. The programme is based on a theory of change that embodies four action areas:

1. Take a locally informed approach: participating cities commit to undertake a scoping study to understanding the nature of the issues are and what would work (and is working) to address them.
2. Develop and implement laws and policies to prevent and respond to sexual violence. Edmonton for instance, developed a policy to support municipal employees experiencing domestic violence; Quito passed a by-law outlawing sexual harassment in public spaces.
3. Develop an expand view of safety by supporting a gender approach across all municipal departments' planning. This includes urban planning, public infrastructure and economic development.
4. Be a leader in supporting the conditions for social norms change to promote women's and girls' rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence.

The benefits to Halifax include:

- Participation in Global Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Stakeholders Global Forum, and receiving technical assistance services from UN Women
- Learning opportunities from other cities, world class experts
- Featured by UN Women as a champion city in gender accountability
- Contributing to the global development of norms and standards for safety in cities

### **Next Steps**

On behalf of the municipality, Mayor Savage sends a letter the executive director of UN Women, requesting to participate in the programme and identifying a coordinator responsible for the initiative. The Nova Scotia Status of Women supports this programme with discussions currently underway to jointly sign the letter with the Mayor.

- A joint announcement is made with UN Women on Halifax's participation in the programme
- A scoping study is designed and conducted, guided by an advisory committee
- An implementation plan is developed, and actions are implemented sequentially by priority