



Spotlight
Initiative



Universal rights, global action

IMPACT REPORT 2019-2020

The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. This report outlines the Spotlight Initiative's key signature results from 2019.



Initiated by the European Union and the United Nations:



From United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed

Violence is a concrete barrier to every right a woman or girl has – to education, to work, to learn, to political life, to dignity, to equality, to life. Without an end to all forms of violence against women, we will never realize the capacities of half our planet to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Nor will we be able to secure every individual's human rights or achieve sustainable peace and security. Ending the fear and insecurity too many women live with daily requires not simply addressing the symptoms, but uprooting the pervasive, systemic cultures of patriarchy and inequality.

Across the globe, defenders of women's rights are being silenced, imprisoned and murdered. Victims and survivors of violence are being publicly blamed and shamed, while in too many places, men with power evade justice.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these and other longstanding inequalities. Since the start of this crisis, we have seen an exponential and alarming rise in all forms of

violence against women and girls – domestic violence, exploitation and online abuse. Without a significant increase in action, resources and mobilization, there is a risk of losing years of slow but hard-fought gains.

But there is some good news on the horizon. A diverse, growing, global movement of young people and allies are leading public protests for social justice, climate action, inclusion and gender equality. They are demanding national action to prevent femicides, sexual violence, child marriages and impunity. This year, more than 140 Member States expressed their support for the UN Secretary-General's call for "peace at home" – a complement to his call for global ceasefire on the battlefield during the pandemic – signalling a new opportunity for strong multilateral engagement on ending gender-based violence.

This report documents the many valuable ways in which the Spotlight Initiative is leveraging the comparative advantages of our

UN Resident Coordinators, together with UN entities, government, civil society and donor partners. Through this vital initiative, we are fully committed to ensure our partnership with the European Union continues to deliver high-quality results for women and girls in addressing gender-based violence, as we pursue a future of dignity and opportunity for all.



From European Union Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen

Every human being has the right to live a life free from any form of violence and discrimination. Yet, violence against women and girls is pervasive; no country is exempt. The Spotlight Initiative is now more relevant than ever with the COVID-19 crisis affecting our lives globally and triggering a widely documented upsurge in domestic violence against women and children. Through this partnership, we were able during these last months to swiftly adapt and refocus the Spotlight Initiative to the COVID-19 context, to boost prevention and increase support to victims and help women's organizations.

One of the major strengths of the Spotlight Initiative is to stand by human rights defenders, survivors and activists, in support of their daily fight against gender-based violence. Often themselves survivors, they have become agents of change, challenging deeply rooted gender norms and practices that perpetuate violence and silence its victims. They stand up, putting their lives at risk, against community and political pressures, and resist the mounting backlash against gender equality.

As witnessed by this report, a great deal of progress was achieved in 2019. We managed to tackle the issue head-on in 25 countries across five regions, partnering with the whole of society – including men and boys, religious leaders, teachers, parents, civil society and local authorities – because long-term change must come from within. Laws were developed and reformed; duty-bearer's capacities and knowledge strengthened; right-holders' knowledge, awareness and resilience strengthened; access to and quality of services were improved through one-stop centres; data collection was improved; and capacity of women's organizations was built.

Empowering women, girls and young people to realize their rights and shifting people's minds and behaviours are crucial for achieving lasting change. The present report shows how we put this objective into practice, in education and other sectors, working together with governments, institutions, civil society organizations, teachers, parents, religious leaders, the media and other social actors.

The task and the challenges remain monumental, and the Spotlight Initiative itself is not enough. We must strive to do more and that is why we launched the #WithHer campaign earlier this year. It provides visibility and space for activists and survivors to share their experiences with a wider public, to inspire within and beyond their countries and it shows the impact we can have by working together. Because each time the human rights of women and girls are violated, the rights of every single one of us are at stake.

“A life free from violence” for women and girls/ children is, and will remain, a priority for the European Union. With the EU Gender Equality Strategy and the new Gender Action Plan, which will encompass all external actions, the European Union is firmly committed to maintain its global leadership in gender equality.





Violence threatens rights to which every woman is entitled.

The right to education.

The right to work.

The right to physical and mental well-being.

The right to equality.

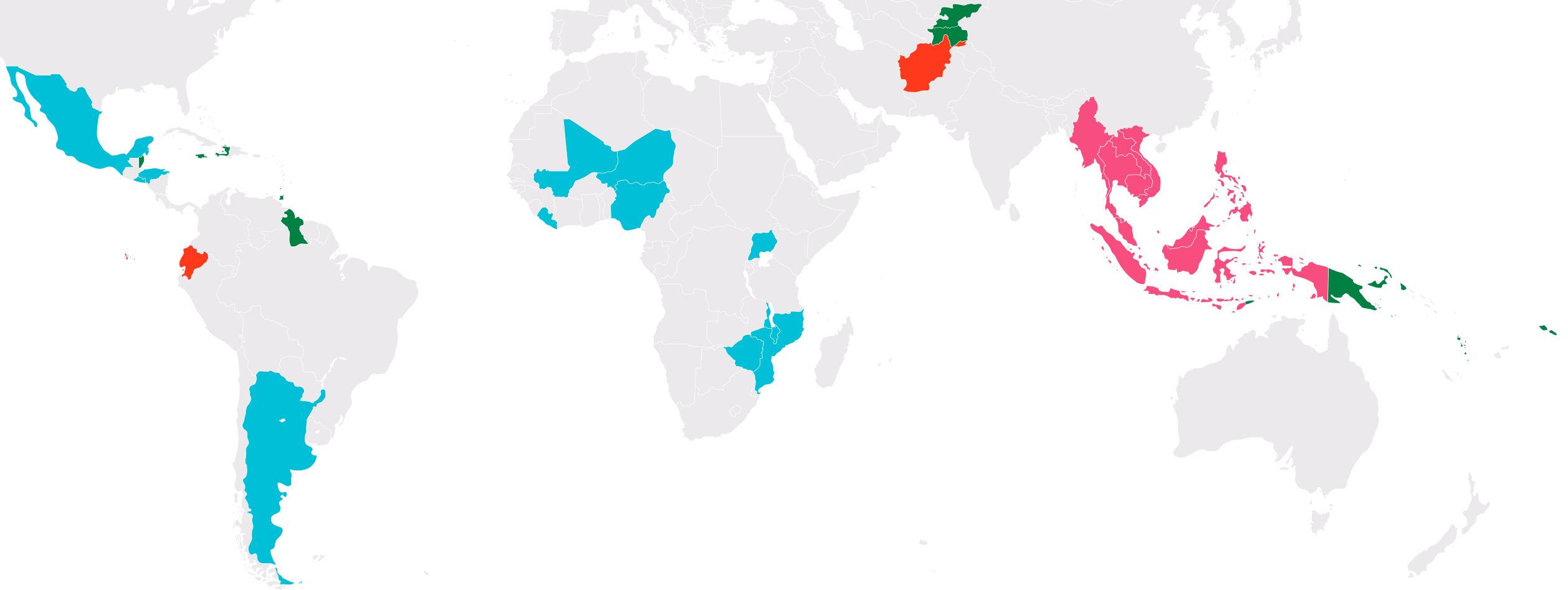
Before the COVID-19 crisis, it was estimated that **1 in 3 women** globally experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime – a pervasive human rights violation. Since the pandemic, violence against women and girls has skyrocketed, a terrifying trend that greatly affects individuals, families and communities, as well as international peace, security and development.

Rights and justice cannot be advanced while violence against women and girls persists.

The Spotlight Initiative is the world's largest targeted effort to **end all forms of violence against women and girls**. We work with governments, civil society organizations, women's rights movements and local communities to address the key causes of violence, and collectively ensure women's full and equal participation in all aspects of life.



Spotlight Initiative: Around the world



ASEAN "Safe and Fair" regional programme approved in 2017

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam

Country programmes approved in 2018

Argentina, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe

Country programmes approved in 2019

Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu

Country programmes in development

Afghanistan, Ecuador

Regional programmes

The Spotlight Initiative's **Safe and Fair Programme** addresses the threat of violence and trafficking among women migrant workers in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Safe and Fair is implemented through a partnership between the International Labour Organization and UN Women, in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

In addition to the Safe and Fair Programme in South-East Asia, the Spotlight Initiative supports **regional programmes in Africa, the Caribbean, Central Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.**

Regional programmes in Latin America and the Pacific were approved in 2019. Regional programmes in Africa, the Caribbean and Central Asia were each approved in 2020.



Photo: UN Women/Youngwa Choi

A young woman with short brown hair and a blue and white strapless dress is holding a teddy bear. She is standing in front of a colorful mural featuring large yellow flowers and abstract blue and white patterns. The background is bright and sunny.

**“Women can wear blue,
can be engineers, be drivers,
be strong and be presidents.”**

**Ana Karen Escobar is from Mexico.
She is a high school student
who performed at a Spotlight
Initiative event that aimed to raise
awareness of violence against
women and girls.**

Leaving no one behind

When the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015, this new global vision centred around the important pledge to leave no one behind. This commitment drives the Spotlight Initiative's efforts to end violence against all women and girls, especially those who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. **Discrimination makes women more vulnerable to violence, and makes it increasingly difficult to access services and justice.**

We engage women and girls who are often marginalized, such as those with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants, elderly women and ethnic minorities, and prioritize support for women's rights groups working with these populations.



To escape her abusive husband, Elena Felix moved to the Middle East to work as a tailor. Because of her low wages, she needed another part-time job and she began working as a sex worker. When Elena found out that she had contracted HIV, she was sent home to the Philippines. She is now a social worker and activist assisting others living with HIV.



Photo: UN Women/M R Hasan



Civil society at the centre

Most of the progress in ending gender-based violence to date has been due to the sustained demands and organized actions of local women's rights activists. Working on the front lines with those directly impacted by violence, civil society organizations and progressive social movements are uniquely positioned to effect change through collective advocacy, and programmes to prevent and respond to violence.

Yet, these important civil society actors, and particularly local and grassroots organizations, remain severely underfunded. Studies show that only 1 per cent of gender-focused aid from governments goes to autonomous women's rights activists

and groups; most funding tends to go to international organizations based in donor countries rather than local organizations leading their own, context-specific solutions.

The Spotlight Initiative aims to change that. In 2019, **50 per cent of our programme funds globally were budgeted for civil society organizations.** Eighty-two per cent of the committed funds targeted national and local civil society – predominately women's rights organizations. An additional **10 per cent of overall regional funding envelopes was earmarked to directly support and strengthen women's organizations,** in particular at national and grassroots levels.

Moreover, civil society is a critical partner at all levels and at all phases of our programmes. Recognizing their expertise and reach, we work with a diverse range of civil society organizations to develop and implement all our programmes. Civil society partners also make key decisions and provide strategic guidance at the highest levels of Spotlight Initiative's governing bodies.

It is important that we use our global platform to spotlight these organizations' invaluable work and help them connect with others to enhance coordination and amplify voices. Together, we are pioneering new ways of partnering that are equal, inclusive and transparent.



The Spotlight Initiative partners with two UN trust funds – the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund – to expand and reinforce support for civil society in Africa and Latin America. **In 2019, more than \$15 million in grants were awarded** by the funds to organizations working to end violence against women and girls, including women’s rights and feminist groups at national and grassroots levels.

In May 2020, the Spotlight Initiative and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women reallocated \$9 million to support existing grantees in Africa and enable them to adapt and respond to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changing minds and attitudes

Why did we name this initiative “**Spotlight**”?
Because we are shining a light on a persistent yet often overlooked crisis.



Photo: Spotlight Initiative

Gender-based violence takes root in power imbalances that are largely preserved by a global patriarchal system resistant to change.

But we can prevent violence against women and girls if we **keep drawing the world's attention to gendered discrimination and work to change the social norms and practices that keep it alive.**

At Spotlight Initiative, we employ a range of strategies to shift people's minds and behaviours, including efforts to increase public awareness and create space for activists and survivors to share their stories.

Through door-to-door campaigns, workshops and local events, we work with practitioners and activists to educate communities about sexual and gender-based violence.

It is important to work with everyone in the community – women, men, girls and boys – to develop tailored approaches and truly effect change.

A fundamental step in eradicating violence is learning to detect it in time and stop it, not normalize it.

LALI ESPÓSITO, SINGER, ACTOR AND #AMIGADATECUENTA SPOKESPERSON

In Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique and Uganda, we helped set up dozens of local clubs for men and boys to discuss sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment, as well as gender justice and human rights more broadly.

Sexuality education – both in and out of school settings – has been shown to reduce sexual violence and help promote healthier attitudes and behaviours regarding gender. In 2019, we worked with governments to provide comprehensive sexuality education programmes that reached nearly 350,000 young people in 11 countries.

Many of our campaigns are circulated on a larger scale using mass media. **In 2019, the Spotlight Initiative shared our messages with more than 42 million people** in target countries, using television, radio, billboards, the internet and printed materials. In Mozambique, for instance, we partner with the radio soap opera “Ouro Negro” to challenge norms about domestic violence and discuss relevant laws and services in its popular biweekly drama. In Argentina, our popular digital campaign – #AmigaDateCuenta – promotes healthy dating behaviour and encourages young people not to view jealousy, humiliation and control by their partner as normal or natural.



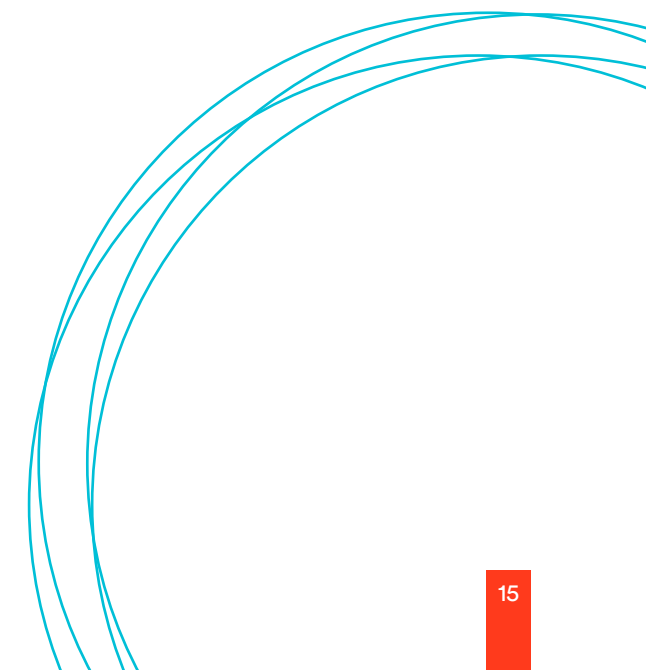
Lali Espósito


Photo: Spotlight Initiative
Argentina/Carolina Scaglione



The media has a critical role to play in **transforming norms and attitudes that drive violence against women and girls.**

Research shows that news media in particular tend to reinforce existing gender inequalities so we are working with journalists to raise awareness as well as ethical standards. By showcasing diverse, positive images of women and girls and reporting on violence in a way that portrays survivors as agents of change, news media can **promote deeper societal discussion and change.**





**“We need to go back
to our value system...
We must work with boys
and girls from young ages.”**

Angel Kabera uses poetry and spoken-word performances to discuss sexual and gender-based violence, subjects that are considered taboo in her community in Kampala, Uganda.

Educating communities, one home at a time

Denardina Mussa, 25, has a mission: to speak to 30 people about sexual violence by the end of each day in one of the most violent neighbourhoods in northern Mozambique. After hearing about multiple cases of local girls who were raped, married early or murdered, she signed up to volunteer with Ophenta, an organization that runs door-to-door campaigns to educate communities about sexual and gender-based violence.

“Many people don’t want to acknowledge sexual violence,” said Denardina. Facing others’ resistance and fearing for her own safety are the hardest parts of the job. But Denardina is able to

talk to strangers and help them change their minds and behaviours, thanks to community leaders who are trained by Ophenta, which is supported by the Spotlight Initiative. Ophenta leaders escort volunteers into the community, support them and help refer cases of violence to the authorities.

“We have dissuaded families that were about to marry their underaged daughters, and these girls are now back in school,”

said Denardina. She has even had fathers ask her to return and teach their children about gender-based violence.



Denardina Mussa

Photo: UNICEF/Ricardo Franco



In Mali, the Spotlight Initiative has worked with traditional chiefs to combat child marriage through local decrees. Oumou (left) fled her village in Mali after a forced marriage. Today, at age 13, she has reunited with her family, including her father (right), and is attending school. She says she plans to become a lawyer in the future “to defend the cause of girls and women”.

I AM

#WithHer

ARE YOU?

In 2020, we launched the #WithHer campaign to **raise global awareness of violence against women and girls**. Learn more about the campaign by searching the hashtag on social media or visiting www.spotlightinitiative.org/withher.



A student from General Francisco Villa High School in Ecatepec, Mexico, stands in front of the mural that she and her classmates painted to raise awareness about violence against women and girls in their community. She raises her fist as a sign of resistance against gender-based violence.



Photo: UN Women/Marcela Erosa

The power of partnerships

All of our work is predicated on the power of partnerships to achieve transformative results.

At our core, the Spotlight Initiative is a ground-breaking partnership between the United Nations and the European Union.

We collaborate with a diverse array of partners to design and implement all of our programmes. Civil society organizations, especially those **representing marginalized groups like indigenous women, women with disabilities, migrant women and women and girls living in rural areas**, are among our chief collaborators.

Regional and national institutions are also critical partners. We design all programmes in consultation with governments and ensure activities are aligned with regional and country strategies.



Photo: European Union Commissioner for International Partnerships



European Union Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen
and United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed

Heads of State and prime ministers also serve as powerful allies, as they broadly share our key messages and encourage constituents to reject harmful beliefs and practices.

Working across sectors is key, given the multi-dimensional nature of violence against women and girls. By partnering with institutions in education, finance, gender, health, legal, justice and more, we are able to not only develop more effective interventions but also leverage resources and build buy-in for reform. Working with institutions at the community level is particularly important since local authorities have the most direct role in promoting and protecting women's and girls' health and rights.

The complexity and scale of violence against women and girls requires increased cooperation among all development actors in the field. We are pleased to be partnering with both multilateral and bilateral organizations, including the African Union, Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank and the American, British, Spanish and Swedish development agencies, on various country and regional programmes. And thanks in part to Sustainable Development Goal 17, there are more opportunities for the private sector to lend their expertise and mobilize funds, too.

To have a truly catalytic effect, we know we need to also engage a range of new and

perhaps non-traditional partners, including influential groups like media, academia, artists and traditional and religious leaders.

In Malawi, Mali and Niger, the Spotlight Initiative worked with religious leaders to make official public statements condemning female genital mutilation and child marriage. In Mozambique Niger and Nigeria, we held trainings for religious communities to shift attitudes towards and end practices of violence against women and girls. In New York City, we hosted global dignitaries, decision makers, journalists and artists to preview and discuss the new film “The Milkmaid” that highlights the myriad threats that radicalism and insurgency pose to women living in West Africa.



Photo: Spotlight Initiative

We are determined to improve the participation of women in all areas of public life and guarantee their rights through the prevention of violence and discrimination.

ANDRÉS MANUEL LÓPEZ OBRADOR, PRESIDENT OF MEXICO

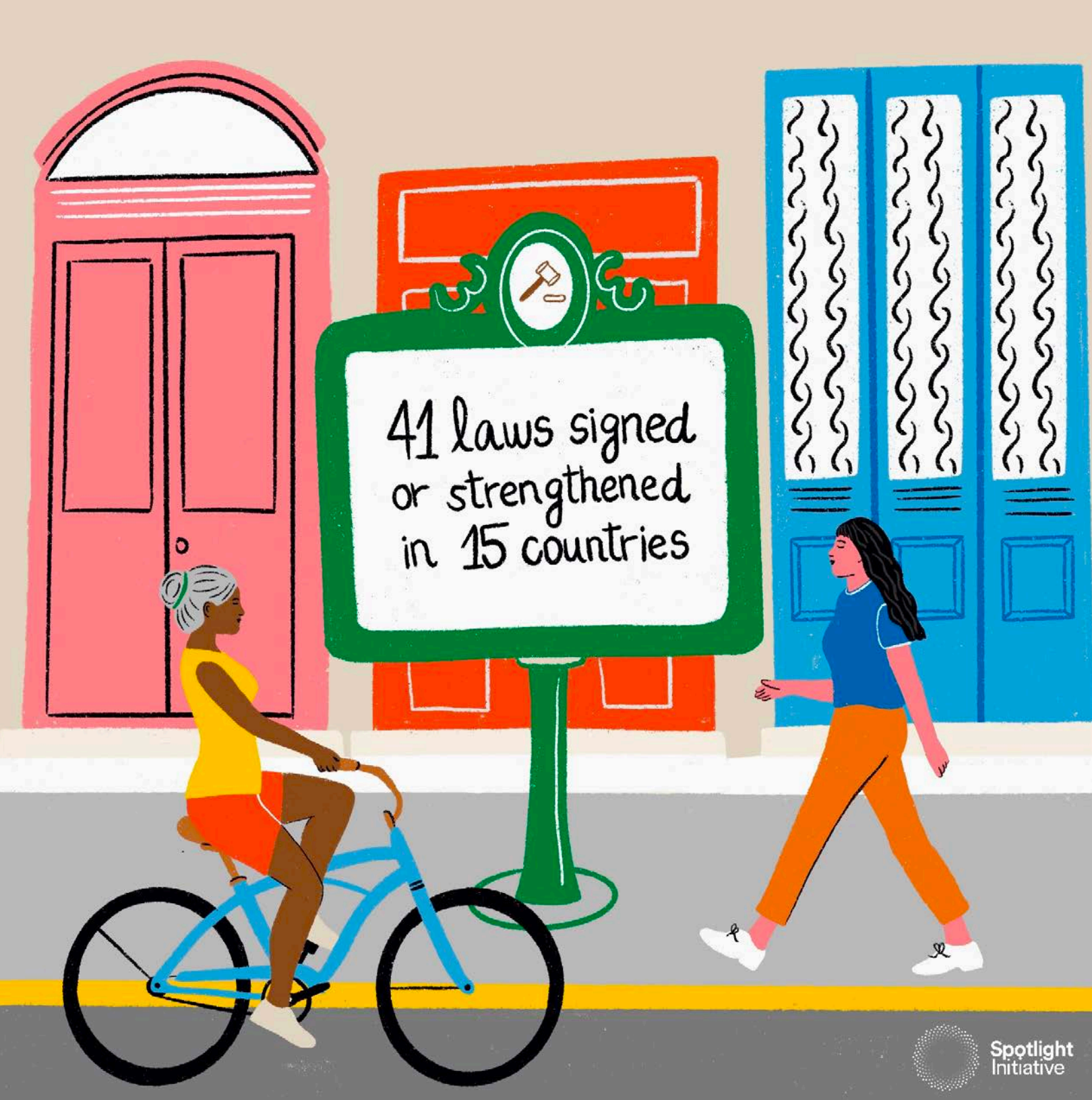


President of Mexico Andrés Manuel López Obrador and UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka lead a press conference at the launch of Spotlight Initiative in Mexico. The launch took place at Palacio Nacional in Mexico City.

“We thank all those who have contributed to the abandonment of female genital mutilation in our community.”



Ousmane Fakoro Traoré is the imam of Tongoye, a village in Mali. With other religious leaders, he is leading the change in his community to eliminate harmful practices against women and girls.



Strengthening legislation

Supportive policies and legislation are the foundation of any genuine effort to promote women's rights and effectively respond to violence against women and girls. Working with civil society and other local partners, the Spotlight Initiative uses human rights standards and real-life experiences of women and girls to assess countries' legal frameworks and identify areas for improvement or reform. **In 2019, our work led to 41 laws newly signed or strengthened in 15 countries** that support gender equality or the elimination of gender-based violence. We also push to have more women's rights advocates at the table when laws are being developed, and work to build the capacity of parliamentarians and activists in promoting and developing gender-equitable laws.



Every year, the global campaign “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” kicks off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, Human Rights Day. In 2019, the Spotlight Initiative supported associated campaign events around the world, including in Uganda, where more than 500 *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi) drivers dressed in orange and drove through the streets of Kampala with signs and messages about making the streets safe for women and girls.

Accessing essential services

Women and girls who experience violence often don't receive the services and support they need. Whether due to a lack of access or funding, insufficient staff, stigma or fear, it is imperative that we better connect survivors with quality, comprehensive and non-discriminatory services that support their recovery and hold perpetrators accountable.

One priority in recent years has been increasing access to services in rural areas, where many of the world's most vulnerable women and girls live. In Zimbabwe, for instance, we are piloting a mobile "one-stop" centre to provide rural women and girls with medical, police, legal and psychosocial services that can travel to wherever they are.

In 2019, we saw a 15 per cent increase in survivors seeking help from support services, and a 10 per cent increase in cases reported to the police across our country programmes.



From survivor to advocate

A woman in my village connected me and several other women to a “recruitment agency” offering waitressing jobs in Malaysia. We were brought to Manila to “process paperwork”. My younger sister was with me; she was only 17.

*We were then sent to Southern Philippines for job training. **But instead of training us to wait tables, they made us drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes. Then some women were taken away to do video calls with men.***

When it was time to go to Malaysia, the “recruiters” confiscated our phones and told us what to say and how to act when going through immigration. They noticed that I was scared and that I now knew what was happening. They threatened us with guns. We were terrified.

At immigration, my sister and another young girl were taken aside by someone who appeared to be an NGO worker, who suspected they were being trafficked. I had already passed

through immigration and was forced onto a boat with the other women who had gone through.

I couldn’t stop crying. Then the boat started turning around. When we got back to the port, there were uniformed men with guns. Someone called my name. They brought me into a room, and I saw my sister. I was asked for the names of the other women, but I didn’t know their full names.

*In the end, only five of us made it back. We were met by someone from an NGO that helps migrant women and trafficked persons. They brought our families to where we were and helped us to get home. **The NGO also helped us to recover from our trauma, and now I’m very active in the same organization.** I attend trainings and help other migrant women to be aware of illegal recruitment and how to claim their rights. I also attend livelihoods trainings given by the NGO, and with a small amount of capital now I have my own small business and an income for myself!*



Abegail Compuesto

Photo: UN Women/
Mohammad Rakibul Hasan



Abegail Compuesto is a member of Batis AWARE Women’s Organization, an organization that works with the Safe and Fair programme in the Philippines to advance the rights of women migrant workers in the ASEAN region.



A volunteer poses in front of a Spotlight Initiative mural that young people from Intibucá in Honduras painted to raise awareness of violence against women and girls in their community.

Data as a transformative tool

Current statistics on violence against women and girls are often incomplete or underestimate the magnitude of the problem across regions. Better data is critical in order to identify and tackle gender-based violence and to address the significant needs and realities of victims and survivors.

In 2019, we worked with partners to strengthen data collection and analysis, and expand categories to ensure that all forms of violence are officially captured. In Nigeria, funding and technical support from the Spotlight Initiative was used to establish three new databases to help track violence against women and girls, which also contributed to increased reporting. In Honduras, our consultations with local communities revealed the need to reflect femicide (intentional killing of females because of gender) in official data, which paved the way for its inclusion in national statistics.



Photo: United Nations

Pushing for innovation

With our ambitious agenda, the Spotlight Initiative strives to be an international platform for innovation. In 2019, we piloted a range of innovations to uncover new ways to effectively combat gender-based violence. Technology plays a vital role, like promoting digital apps that can deliver real-time, secure services to women and girls anywhere, and leveraging these platforms to improve data collection. But it's also about creating space for different ways of thinking. In Zimbabwe, for instance, we launched an Innovators Against Gender-Based Violence programme for graduate students and tasked them with finding new ways to advance the rights of women and girls in their communities. Their research will be some of the first content in our new global, online feminist knowledge hub.



Each of us has the power to end violence against women and girls.

Standing up to backlash

We will not give ground. We will not turn back. We will push back against the pushback. And we will keep pushing.

SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, UNITED NATIONS

Globally, we are witnessing a growing backlash against women's rights, which is further normalizing violence against women and girls. While many countries have made real progress in advancing gender equality, too many still suffer from dangerous patriarchal conditioning and conservative religious trends that restrict and punish women and girls for the very act of being female.

The recent rise of populism and authoritarianism, which has been joined by more misogynistic, sexist and homophobic hate speech, has fuelled the problem. With civic space under attack and new campaigns of fear that limit our rights to freedom of expression and assembly, some politicians are rolling back legal protections and support systems for women and girls, and moving to suppress women's rights activists.



Ni Una Menos (Spanish for "Not one [woman] less") is a grassroots, feminist movement that began in Argentina. The movement campaigns against femicide and gender-based violence across Latin America.



Photo: UN Women/DzilamMéndez



Photo: UN Women

In the midst of an unprecedented global crisis, the situation is even more dire. As COVID-19 has spread, so too has a shadow pandemic: rising levels of violence against women and girls, who are more vulnerable in the face of economic fragility and widespread lockdowns.

We need to combat – everywhere and with all our strength – violence against women and girls, which is a gross violation of human rights. Everyone, regardless of his or her gender, should be able to live free from violence and pursue his or her chosen path in life. Women’s contributions to society are key to building a fairer and more prosperous world.

URSULA VON DER LEYEN, PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Photo: UN Women/Younghwa Choi





Our collective work is as crucial as ever. **Ending violence against women and girls is critical to achieving sustainable development.** Decades of progress and millions of lives are at risk. We must keep gender-based violence at the top of government agendas and engage the public more broadly during this difficult time. We must continue to support women’s and feminist organizations and groups, in all their forms, in particular at local and community levels, and stand with the women’s rights activists and defenders facing increasing violence.

Are you with us?

Learn more:

www.spotlightinitiative.org

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Illustrations by Sol Cotti

Produced by Davis Communication Strategies

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