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The international human rights obligations of a State extend to all levels of government — national, regional, and local — and to any exercise of governmental authority. To enforce these obligations, many cities and local governments around the World have taken meaningful actions for protecting and promoting human rights. These actions are examples for other local, regional and city officials and decision-makers for taking concrete actions, including promulgating local laws, policies and administrative measures that are in line with State obligations, promoting equality, participation, good governance, building trust with inhabitants and addressing local and global human rights challenges in a sustainable way.

Preventing and Addressing Violence Against Women by Local Governments

Violence against women is one of the most widespread forms of human rights violations and continues to impact the lives of women and girls everywhere. Multiple efforts have been carried out by local governments throughout the globe to fight against it, and in developing mechanisms to support victims and allowing better access to justice and reparation.

An international obligation to eliminate violence against women

Various international human rights instruments create the obligations of states – at all levels – regarding women’s rights and violence against women. This includes the obligation to take legislative and any other measures to promote and protect the right of everyone, particularly women, to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere.

Ratified by 189 States, the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) and its complaint procedure are fundamental to the protection and promotion of the rights of women, providing a broad definition of discrimination against women, both direct and indirect, including intentional or unintentional forms, before the law or in practice, in all aspects of public and private life, whether perpetrated by the State, its agents, private actors or individuals.

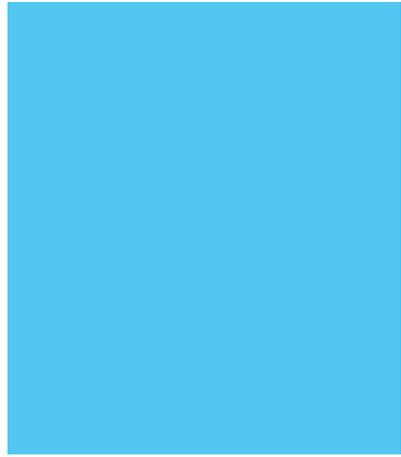
The Committee in charge of monitoring the application of CEDAW has developed useful guidance including the [2017 an updated roadmap](#) for preventing and combating violence against women.

Protection and Prevention Measures

Prevention—addressing the structural causes, as well as the risk and protective factors, associated with violence—is pivotal to eliminating violence against women and girls completely. It requires political commitment, enabling laws and policies that promote gender equality, and addressing the multiple forms of discrimination women face daily. This includes the provision of the full range of protection services to victims or potential victims and in infrastructures such as [shelters](#), [longer-term housing](#), and [protection orders](#). These measures need to be readily available and easily accessible to women and girls.

In order to prevent femicides, [Quito \(Ecuador\)](#) has implemented an integrated protection system, working together with local courts and the judicial system, which includes a “unique registry of violence” as an instrument for monitoring data on cases of gender-based violence. The city of [Barcelona \(Spain\)](#) has devoted efforts to prevent violence and femicides through the adoption and promotion of protocols and campaigns, including specific protocols for night-time leisure venues. In [Brazil](#), [Sao Paulo’s](#) Casa da Mulher Brasileira (Home of the Brazilian Woman) shelters women in situation of violence and focus on supporting victims as well as coordinating with competent authorities to prevent situations that might put women at risk in their domestic environment.

[Iztapalapa \(Mexico\)](#) implemented several measures to improve the support of victims and prevention of violence against women. The municipality has developed a methodology for preventing femicide, rape and other forms of violence; which included a follow-up strategy and training of 200 local civil servants. Numerous workshops and awareness-raising initiatives on the issue of femicides were organized. The city has also focused its attention on making public spaces safer and more inclusive. Iztapalapa also implemented policies that provide hotlines offering legal and psychological support and accompaniment to victims, as well as access to safe spaces and shelters.



Integrating women and grassroots solidarity networks to policies

The [equal participation of women](#) and their access to positions of political leadership and decision-making at all levels are fundamental to achieving gender equality. In many cases, local governments have relied on the use of participatory democracy to strengthen their policy efforts. In [Seine-Saint-Denis \(France\)](#), public officials working on violence against women were brought together to evaluate their needs and how to strengthen their policies’ effectiveness. [Umea \(Sweden\)](#) introduced the “participatory women walks” to collectively identify potential threats in public space and how to build safer cities that are adapted to the specific needs of women.

[Rosario \(Argentina\)](#) introduced a participatory approach to its policies through the creation of “networks of women”. These networks facilitate civil society and women’s direct input and involvement in policy development. [Quito \(Ecuador\)](#) followed a similar approach through its local Council for the Protection of Human Rights, which welcomes women groups in the definition of new policies on VAWG



Strengthening measures in times of crisis

The intersection between the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic of violence against women has amplified pre-existing gaps and shortcomings in the prevention of violence against women as a human rights violation. In many cases, lockdown measures increased the risk of sexual and gender-based violence against women, especially domestic violence. This has exposed the need to reinforce measures at the local, national, and global levels in preventing and combating the pandemic of gender-based violence against women.

In this context, local and regional governments have adopted new approaches to allow victims to more easily seek support in cases of gender-based violence regardless of the lockdown restrictions and other measures. The Pichincha province in Ecuador, for example, developed the “Canasta Roja” (Red Basket) protocol, which allows women to denounce their aggressors through a phone call by asking for a “red basket” of food - the keyword that will activate the provincial government protocol to support the victim. Montevideo (Uruguay) has implemented a recovery plan called “Plan ABC” to address violence against women issue during the COVID-19 crisis through specific interventions. It also intervenes in other areas such as access to food, employment, and housing based on mainstreaming intersectionality a gender approach. In Canada’s women’s shelters have been declared as essential services in most provinces and territories and have remained open throughout the pandemic.



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Observatories and watch roles

The weaknesses of prevention systems, lack of proper risk assessment and the scarcity or poor quality of data are major barriers in preventing gender-related killing of women and developing meaningful prevention strategies. The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, has called for the establishment at the global, national and regional levels of observatories on gender-related killings and violence against women on her 2016 report.

The Observatory of Seine-Saint-Denis, France is a leading example. The Departmental Council of Seine-Saint-Denis implemented a pioneer local observatory on VAWG in 2002, which played an instrumental role in mainstreaming observatories in the rest of France. The Seine-Saint-Denis observatory has carried out monitoring, prevention, and victim support initiatives in close coordination with the work of other stakeholders on the ground (including national agencies and institutions, civil society groups and local governments inside the department).

In 2021, the International Observatory on Violence against Women was created with Seine Saint Denis’ leadership, a platform that brings together the efforts of local governments to fight violence against women in different local governments and territories around the world to build data, raise awareness and foster collective learning on this subject. The Observatory also assists partner communities in setting up their own local observatories to combat violence against women.

Municipalities around the world can actively commit to eradicating violence against women by joining this initiative. More information is provided on the [observatory's website](#)

