



16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence
25 November - 10 December 2023

Concept Note

1. BACKGROUND

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an international civil society led campaign that takes place each year. It commences on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and ends on 10 December, Human Rights Day, indicating that violence against women is the most pervasive breach of human rights worldwide. It was originated by activists at the inaugural [Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991](#). It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

In support of this civil society initiative, under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General's [UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women initiative](#) (UNiTE) calls for global action to increase awareness, galvanise advocacy efforts and share knowledge and innovations to end VAWG once and for all. Launched in 2008, UNiTE is a multi-year advocacy effort aimed at preventing and eliminating VAWG around the world. UNiTE calls on governments, development actors, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, the media and the entire UN system to join forces in addressing violence against women and girls.

In 2023, the UNiTE campaign theme is *Invest to Prevent Violence Against Women & Girls* and will focus on the importance of financing different prevention strategies to stop violence from occurring in the first place. It will leverage key global normative and advocacy platforms to build momentum and galvanize collective efforts to prevent violence against women. This year's campaign theme is also aligned to the 2024 priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women¹, focused on *Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of*

¹ The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective. The campaign will also activate and amplify the commitments to prevent violence against women under the Generation Equality Forum and Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and the Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights (EJR)² and catalyse global advocacy fora, including the Generation Equality midpoint moment, and the SDG midpoint summit, to be held in September 2023.

2. CAMPAIGN'S THEME FOR 2023 – UNiTE! Invest to Prevent Violence against Women & Girls

Violence against women and girls remains one of the most prevalent and pervasive human rights violations in the world. Despite many countries passing laws to combat violence against women, weak enforcement and discriminatory social norms remain significant problems. Globally, an estimated [736 million women](#) — almost one in three — have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life³.

Violence against women has been heightened across different settings as well, including the workspace and online spaces. A global study by the Economist Intelligence Unit found that 38 per cent of women have had personal experiences of online violence, and 85 per cent of women who spend time online have witnessed digital violence against other women. A global study on women working in the technology sector found that 44 per cent of women founders had experienced some form of harassment at work in 2020, of which 41 per cent of women experienced sexual harassment⁴.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, and climate change have further intensified VAWG, exacerbated existing challenges and generated new and emerging threats. Economic insecurity, disrupted livelihoods and limited social protection continue to increase women's and girls' vulnerability to violence⁵. According to the Rapid Gender Assessment surveys (RGAs) on the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 conducted by UN Women in 58 countries, 45 per cent of women reported that they or a woman they know has experienced a form of VAW since COVID-19⁶. Following Hurricane Katrina, the rate of rape among women displaced to trailer parks rose 53.6 times the baseline rate in Mississippi for that year⁷.

² Generation Equality is the world's leading effort to unlock political will and increase investment and implementation on gender equality to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the commitments outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

⁴ Women Who Tech (2020). The State of Women in Tech and Startups. Available at: <https://womenwhotech.org/data-and-resources/state-women-tech-and-startups>.

⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Policy-brief-Addressing-violence-against-women-through-social-protection-en.pdf>.

⁶ <https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Measuring-shadow-pandemic.pdf> (pg.5).

⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Infographic-Tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-context-of-climate-change-en.pdf>.

Violence negatively affects women's physical and mental health and well-being at all stages of their life and impacts their professional development and economic empowerment⁸. Violence against women has also broader social and economic consequences for families, communities, and societies⁹ and impedes the achievement of sustainable development. New IMF research in Sub-Saharan shows how violence against women and girls is a major threat to economic development in the region. An increase in violence against women by 1 percentage point is associated with a 9 per cent lower level of economic activity¹⁰. At the global level, it is estimated that the cost of violence against women (public, private and social) amounts to US\$1.5 trillion¹¹. Across the European Union, the cost of gender-based violence is estimated at €366 billion a year, where violence against women makes up 79 per cent of this cost, amounting to €289 billion¹².

The good news is that VAWG is preventable and there is more evidence than ever before about what works¹³. The [RESPECT Women Framework](#) is a comprehensive framework with evidence-based strategies that have demonstrated positive results in the prevention and response to violence against women which presents member states, development partners and the private sector with strong options for investments. The global EU-UN [Spotlight Initiative](#), the largest targeted effort to eliminate violence against women and girls led by the United Nations, is demonstrating that a significant, concerted and comprehensive investment in ending violence can make a transformative difference in the lives of women and girls¹⁴. For example, larger investments on efforts to end violence against women have doubled the conviction rate for gender-based violence across 12 countries and led to the strengthening of 477 laws or policies to end violence against women and girls. Addressing economic hardship, coupled with other promising prevention strategies such as investing on women rights organizations¹⁵, transforming social norms, addressing unequal gender power relations, strengthening essential services for survivors, and enabling safer environments¹⁶, among others, have the potential to prevent and reduce VAW.

⁸ www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/Global-safety-framework-Section1-compressed.pdf (pg.130).

⁹ www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/RESPECT-Women-Preventing-violence-against-women-en.pdf.

¹⁰ www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/11/19/The-Heavy-Economic-Toll-of-Gender-based-Violence-Evidence-from-Sub-Saharan-Africa-509667.

¹¹ www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/speech-by-lakshmi-puri-on-economic-costs-of-violence-against-women.

¹² <https://eige.europa.eu/news/gender-based-violence-costs-eu-eu366-billion-year>.

¹³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/05/respect-women-preventing-violence-against-women>.

¹⁴ www.spotlightinitiative.org/publications/spotlight-initiative-global-annual-narrative-progress-report-2022.

¹⁵ Htun, M & Weldon, S.L. (2012). The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1976-2005; Mama Cash (July 2020) Feminist Activism Works! A review of select literature on the impact of feminist activism in achieving women's rights.

¹⁶ www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/RESPECT-implementation-guide-Strategy-summary-Poverty-reduced-en.pdf.

The links between poverty, financial stressors and hardships, and violence against women are well established, with women facing disproportionately high risks of violence¹⁷. At the same time, violence increases women's risk of poverty and economic hardship due to both the direct costs of violence such as out-of-pocket health expenditures, and indirect costs such as reduced earnings. The economic empowerment of women, together with approaches that strengthen equitable gender norms and dynamics for lasting changes for women and girls, can serve as a **protective factor** against gender-based violence, through access to assets such as land ownership¹⁸ and decent employment that enable women to prevent and escape abusive relationships and exploitative situations¹⁹.

In efforts to build back better from the pandemic and multiple crisis, investments in preventing violence against women and girls are more important than ever.

These investments have tremendous benefits for gender equality, poverty reduction and development. However, less than 0.2 per cent of global Official Development Assistance (ODA) is directed to GBV prevention, and that funding is often poor quality, short-term and sporadic. Few national governments have transformative GBV prevention policies or align their budgets with prevention strategies and interventions.²⁰ It is important to address violence against women in a holistic way and incorporate it into broader policies and programmes, such as social protection systems, to strengthen women's economic security and autonomy and reduce the risk of violence²¹. In turn, these policies need robust resources to support better planning and implementation. In addition, creating safer workplaces is key for women to access economic resources and become less vulnerable to violence²².

3. ADVOCACY OBJECTIVES

The theme and activities of the UNITE campaign this year is *Invest to Prevent Violence Against Women & Girls*. It calls upon all UNITE networks, civil society and women's rights organizations, organizations working with men and boys, the UN system, the Generation Equality Action Coalitions government partners, human rights defenders, schools, universities, private sector, sports clubs and associations and individuals to step up and support different prevention strategies to stop violence from occurring in the first place.

¹⁷ Stockl H, March LM, Pallitto C, et al. (2014). Intimate partner violence among adolescents and young women: prevalence and associated factors in nine countries: a cross sectional study. BMC Public Health. 2014; 14:751.

¹⁸ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#notes>.

¹⁹ General Assembly (2006). In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary General: 31. A/61/122/Add.1. United Nations, New York.

²⁰ <https://preventgbv.org/shared-advocacy-agenda>.

²¹ unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Policy-brief-Addressing-violence-against-women-through-social-protection-en.pdf.

²² www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Addressing-violence-and-harassment-against-women-in-the-world-of-work-en.pdf (p. 10).

Key advocacy objectives are:

- **Invite everyone to be an ally in preventing VAWG** through taking a stand publicly, engaging in activities and events to raise awareness of VAWG in their communities.
- **Mobilize all member states to allocate national budget to prevent violence against women and girls**, including through their own national action plans and prevention across education, health, and social protection sectors by incorporating VAWG prevention.
- **Advocate for increasing ODA** towards prevention of VAW, in line with national priorities and to support policy formulation, if feasible.
- **Call for greater support, increased long-term, sustainable investments** from states, private sector, foundations, and other donors **to autonomous women's rights organizations** working to end violence against women and girls in all their diversity.
- **Advocate for private and public sector investments on workplace policies** and measures that ensure women's economic security and safety.
- **Mobilize member states, development partners, philanthropies, private sector, universities and all actors to join the Generation Equality Action Coalition on GBV** and make tangible policy, programmatic and financial commitments to accelerate transformative action to end all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, including through:
 - Investing in the [collective commitment on prevention](#), and
 - Joining the collective commitment of the Action Coalition on GBV and the Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights on [gender based violence and harassment in the world of work](#) and to ratify and implement the ILO Convention 190.²³

The Generation Equality [Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence](#) is mobilizing governments, civil society, women's rights and youth led organizations, international organizations, philanthropies and the private sector to take concerted action and deliver concrete change for women and girls worldwide, through four concrete actions: (1) Strengthening laws and policies and increasing resources; (2) Scaling up evidence driven prevention programming; (3) Scaling up comprehensive, accessible and quality services for survivors; and (4) Increasing support and resources to autonomous girl-led and women's rights organizations to play their leadership role in ending violence against women and girls.

Building on the momentum at the Generation Equality midpoint moment in September 2023, the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence will mobilize action to amplify the UNiTE campaign's call to **UNiTE! Invest to Prevent Violence against Women & Girls**.

Please see the [Generation Equality website](#) for further information.

The [Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights](#) together with the [Action Coalition on GBV](#) have a collective commitment on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work focused on calling for more states and regional actors to ratify and implement ILO Convention No. 190 and for all workplaces – both private and public to adopt and implement policies to prevent and eliminate gender based violence against women.

²³ ILO Convention 190 (www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_721160.pdf) is the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

4. MAIN PRINCIPLES OF UNiTE CAMPAIGN ADVOCACY

- **Honour and acknowledge women's movements** and their leadership in the 16 Days of Activism and in preventing and fighting violence against women and girls in general.
- **Elevate the voices of young feminists and youth-led organisations:** While the world has been reviewing progress made since the adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), it is time to create platforms to elevate voices of the next generation feminists who are shaping their future now.
- **'Leave No One Behind':** Apply a human rights-based approach and focus attention on the most underserved and disadvantaged groups of women and girls experiencing intersecting forms of harm in efforts to prevent and end violence against women and girls.
- **Survivor-centred:** Take a respectful and 'do-no-harm' approach to the telling and/or retelling of survivor stories, only with their informed consent and under conditions in which they feel empowered to exercise their agency. This and the empowerment principles are vital for the engagement of survivor advocates/activists on their own terms. All UNiTE partners must ensure that survivor advocates' rights, safety, dignity and confidentiality are prioritized and upheld.
- **Whole-of-government and society strategies to prevent VAWG:** Everyone in society has an important role to play in ending violence against women and girls and we all must work together across sectors to address the various aspects of violence.
- **Transformative:** Fostering critical examination of gender roles, regimes and practices in order to create or strengthen equitable gender norms and dynamics for fundamental, lasting changes for women and girls.

5. KEY ACTIVITIES

The **colour orange** continues to be a UN tool unifying all activities to bring global attention to the initiative, however, in light of the energy crisis, this year we are not calling upon partners to illuminate buildings and landmarks in orange or to do so for a limited period on 25 November. We invite partners to consider different ways of painting the world orange including through decorating buildings, wearing the colour orange and orangings digital spaces throughout the 16 days.