



In collaboration with:

**Live Learning Experience: *Beyond the immediate response to the outbreak of COVID-19***

# COVID-19 and safer cities

Briefing & Learning Note  
Thursday, 25th June, 2020





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*Launched jointly by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Metropolis, and UN-Habitat on March 25th, 2020, the **#BeyondTheOutbreak** Live Learning Experience (LLE) virtual sessions aim at bringing together Local and Regional Governments (LRGs), their associations, and partner organizations to allow and promote meaningful exchange as they find themselves confronting the COVID-19 crisis while maintaining an orderly functioning of public services. Following an initial consultation held during the launching session, the **Live Learning Experience on Secure Cities**, held on Thursday, 25th of June, was devoted to fostering a conversation on **the importance of addressing inequalities as a cornerstone of more safer and secure cities.***

## **Maintaining safer cities during the outbreak**

**With more than half of the world's population under lockdown conditions by early April, COVID-19 has cast a harsh light on inequalities and social distress in urban environments across the globe. Under lockdown conditions, we have seen a spike in domestic violence, in civil unrest, and other crimes as movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, high levels of stress and anxiety create tensions and strains at home.**

If the pandemic is amplifying some of the inequalities and shortcomings of our system, this has been the case, as well, in terms of safety and security for all. Wherever measures have relied on security forces to enforce COVID-19 regulations we have witnessed a rise in racial profiling and police brutality, often spurred by the proliferation of opportunistic discourses that frame the more vulnerable communities as the perpetrators and criminalise poverty. Our territories are now witnessing an increasing mistrust in many public institutions, and this also translates to questions







of legitimacy and accountability of the security forces charged with protecting inhabitants in cities and other human settlements.

COVID-19 responses have created a crisis in providing public safety for all, with heavy responsibility falling on security services, while depleting funds and capacities for other important contributors. We need to avoid going back into old emergency paradigms, ignoring the importance of systemic and collaborative approaches. The impact of this emergency approach has been made worse by regulations and restrictions on mobility and the impact of lock downs on economic and social ecologies, including a spike in domestic violence.

Urgent actions are needed through a multilevel governance of safety approach to achieve safer cities for all inhabitants, and to ensure that trust is regained between our institutions and our communities. Where inhabitants are free from fear of violence, there is greater possibility for people to interact with and trust public institutions, regardless of their migratory or gender status, thereby fostering inclusion and participation. Similarly, effective, transparent and accountable urban governance is crucial for the creation of safe cities and human settlements.

This COVID 19 time with all its uncertainty must be used to reflect, to respond, but most importantly prepare for the social recovery phase that will include post-traumatic growth in cities and building on the resilience that cities have shown through the pandemic period.

## **Live Consultation: challenges and responses in the aftermath of the crisis.**

The mentimeter-led live consultation aimed at spurring the conversation on what measures will be necessary to respond to the pandemic and ensure safer cities after the COVID-19 pandemic, all the while being mindful of the differentiated needs and aspirations of our communities.

The first question asked participants to answer what is the biggest challenge that the pandemic has brought, and immediately the gender dimension was obvious. Not just the spike in gender violence, but gender in the recovery measures was seen as





integral to develop safer cities. The rise in inequalities, and the relationship between

In one word, what is the biggest challenge in terms of security brought upon us by the pandemic?



inequalities and violence was also a key challenge, according to the participants in the exercise. Finally, the spike in police brutality, and the rise of discrimination and racism were key elements that would be expanded upon later during the session.

Participants also weighed in on what the immediate response is

to ensure safer cities during the aftermath. Dialogue among communities and LRGs was seen as critical, since it would allow for the co-production of safety and security for all, as was the coordination among spheres of government in order to ensure measured and effective responses. Participants also argued for the need to enhance diversity, with the option to modify the legal frameworks to sanction conducts receiving a lukewarm response.

What should be prioritized to ensure safer and more resilient cities in the aftermath?



What are the policy priorities needed to achieve the secure cities of the future?



- Historic design
- Resources, improving training of police, social inclusion
- Public space
- a new dimension of security to build trust
- Strong public services
- Gender equality/Cultural/public space
- Inclusion, rights, equity, partnerships
- Democratization of police
- Políticas integradas con enfoque de género y de derechos que promuevan mayor equidad.



The final question asked participants to envision the policy priorities needed to achieve safe and secure cities of the future. Equal access to public space, a reimagined role of police, a new dimension of safety and security that allowed for trust among communities and authorities to grow back, and a gender-responsive policies were among the responses provided by participants.







## A new governance of safety and security

The conversation was started with an introduction addressing the role of local and regional governments in ensuring safety and security during the pandemic and in the aftermath. As is the case with many other basic services, spheres closest to the people are tasked to deal with this safety and security. Secretary General of UCLG **Emilia Saiz** urged participants to think about what Security means both during the pandemic and beyond. She further stated the commitment to developing a strong safety and security agenda, a topic that is often missing from local conversations, but that needs to be tackled in a holistic manner, in order to rise up to the challenge.

**Maimunah Mohd. Sharif**, Under Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-Habitat, laid out the importance of starting a “global conversation” on the concept of safety and security, pointing out that the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda both highlight the important relationship between safety and sustainable development. The Executive Director also argued that cities need to think critically in order to develop a framework of **multi-level governance of safety and security** among spheres of government by focusing on governance through holistic approaches as outlined in the recently adopted UN systemwide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements

**“We really hope that UCLG, UN Habitat and Metropolis can develop a strong safety and security agenda. It is a topic that is missing, but it has not easy to deal with from a local and regional government perspective. I do hope we can contribute to an innovative and creative discussion about it.”**

**Martha Delgado**, Vice Minister for Multilateral Affairs and International Relations and President of the Habitat Assembly, highlighted that safety and security is a critical issue, one that has many interrelations with the Peace Agenda, and thus needs to be a goal in all of the global agendas. The main way to address this, she argued, is through coordination among different spheres of government, and by promoting alliances and multilateral measures that protect human rights.





The Vice Minister argued, as well, that vulnerable communities such as LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and women, had suffered most the inequalities throughout the outbreak and were thus more vulnerable to insecurity, an aspect that needed to be addressed in the recovery.

*"It is fundamental that we promote multilevel and multistakeholder alliances to achieve sustainable urban development, consider these vulnerabilities, and protect human rights"* **Martha Delgado**, Undersecretary of Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights of Mexico

*"Only by implementing holistic approaches to safety shall cities be able to address historical inequalities in a systematic and inclusive way, leaving no one behind. In this sense, the COVID 19 pandemic and its recovery phase presents an opportunity for governments to reboot and transform systems."* **Maimunah Mohd. Sharif**, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

## Equality and security

Inequality is often one of the greatest levers for civil unrest and the outbreak of crime and violence in our cities. As is the case with many of the shortcomings of our system, and as identified in the interactive exercises, the increased inequality spurred by the pandemic had led to an increase in unrest and was a challenge that mayors across the world were undertaking.

**Mxolisi Kaunda**, Mayor of Durban, highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed existing inequalities, and in particular those regarding race and gender. The main efforts of Durban have been in **strengthening public cohesion**, by creating economic opportunities, in particular for the most vulnerable groups and considering informal work environments and settlements. The new realities of our societies, he argued, call on us to create new jobs that support small businesses models, businesses led by women, and the social and solidarity economy. Social solidarity economy and use of technology must be supported.







**Luis Ernesto Gómez**, Secretary of the Interior of Bogota highlighted the dimension of *economic security*. Through ensuring the wellbeing of citizens in this regard, he argued, is the only way to ensure that the sanitary measures are followed, the way in which citizens will trust each other and the authorities. Trust, he argued, needs to be rebuilt in order to comply with social norms, and this needs to go hand-in-hand with civic culture and solidarity, by seeing people help out and give to their community.

The relationship between inequalities, urban safety and security, and the outbreak was further addressed by **Carolina Leitao**, Mayor of Peñalolén Municipality, Santiago, who laid out the challenge of the spikes in the contagion being also concentrated in the areas of more vulnerabilities and crime. Strengthening the social aspect in the response is critical in order to address vulnerabilities, establish a social dynamism and involving local communities.

## **Co-creating security and transforming police response.**

**Wherever measures have relied on security forces to enforce COVID-19 regulations we have witnessed a rise in racial profiling and police brutality, often spurred by the proliferation of opportunistic discourses that frame the more vulnerable communities as the perpetrators. It is integral to recover trust among communities and the authorities that ought to protect them. Local and regional leaders showcased their initiatives in co-creating safety and security during the pandemic and in the aftermath.**

Mayor of Guadalajara, **Ismael Del Toro** shared how the city had aimed to transition from security *enforcement* to security *co-creation*, involving local communities and through an aim on tackling inequalities. The approach included ensuring citizen participation and involving citizens in the decision-making process. This approach included ensuring care for vulnerable populations in order to reactivate and ensure accessible public spaces that are safe for all citizens, in particular women and other at-risk communities. **The co-responsibility of citizens**, he argued, is critical in order to ensure the prevention of future crises similar to this one.





With this model, COVID-19 challenges are to ensure care for vulnerable populations (not only COVID, but also with increased crime and violence), both in terms of health and safety. To ensure that the reactivation of public spaces is gradually made safer.

Gender violence: Specialized care, cross-cutting agenda with other institutes, coordination with the Office for Care and Violence against Women, is based on strengthening institutional capacity for emergency care.

**Guillermo Cespedes**, Chief of Violence Prevention, Oakland City, highlighted the need for community inputs to repair the relationship between institutions and those same communities, in particular in a moment in which institutions seem more distanced than ever from their populations. Oakland has been implementing a community-driven approach to public safety and violence prevention with an important input from communities, and is considering cutting police budgets and enhancing social programmes. Another key condition to enhance this credibility, Oakland argued, is coordination between spheres of government.

Mayor of Bukavu **Meshac Bilubi Ulengabo** highlighted how the police had been trained in community dialogue approaches, and how the local government had been working with the police in strategies to curb insecurity. The issue of crime and violence, he argued, calls for a holistic urban security approach that involves all citizens. He highlighted, finally, the efforts of the city of Bukavu in this regard through workshops that include communities and the police. Police, he argued, need to adapt to the new context, and reform, in order to build resilient populations in the aftermath.

**Paula Mascarenhas**, Mayor of Pelotas, Brazil, shared the city's public safety and security plan that is not limited to the police vision. Since 2017, she stated, Pelotas has worked on integrating the security forces and co-producing security, as well as in prevention and tending to the youth, in order to strengthen the social bonds in the community. The main achievement of this plan, she argued, has been transforming the profile of the police. Together with the police, she argued, the government of **Pelotas** has worked together to reduce crime rates (including crime prevention, with a focus on youth). The main goal, she stated, is to strengthen ties among







communities to ensure a future for the youngest members of society, in particular in the most vulnerable communities. **Benjamin Magalong**, Mayor of Baguio City, had a similar approach, and argued for the need of local governments to work closely with the police, in order to ensure a transparent way of enforcing the law.

“It is possible to have a safety and security plan that recognizes the human capacity for transformation. To do this, we need governments that can invest in collective efforts of solidarity.”

## The gender dimension to urban safety and security

**The pandemic and lockdown conditions have caused a spike in gender violence, and many women have been -and still are- under lockdown with their abuser. Local and regional governments all over the world are mindful of this, and indeed the issue of gender violence was transversal in local governments’ responses.**

**Santiago Saura**, Councillor of Madrid, laid out the endeavors of the city in regard to curbing gender violence during the pandemic, with an increased response and resources, including more dedication in social services for women and children in line with the “Safe Cities for Women and Girls” guidelines.

**Stefanie Chetty**, Director for Urban Development ( Policy and Management) at the National Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), South Africa, highlighted how the country aimed at responding to the spike in gender-based violence through a holistic safety response plan, anchored in an Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) that also aimed to enhance women’s safety in public spaces. Better coordination by all levels of government, she argued, has been critical in the design and implementation of the plan, and the 2030 Agenda is a necessary framework to protect and foster women’s rights in the aftermath of the pandemic and beyond.

Beyond the specific presentations on curbing violence against women, many other participants highlighted city efforts in curbing gender violence. Among them,





**Bukavu**, through its partnership with UN-Habitat; **Magalong**, which had set up a taskforce to curb sexual violence during the pandemic; **Peñalolén**, through its “SOS Mujer” ‘panic button’, coordinated with the public prosecutor’s office and the police; Guadalajara, whose response was based on strengthening institutional capacity for emergency care, in coordination with the Specialized care, cross-cutting agenda with other institutes, coordination with the Office for Care and Violence against Women.

## Inspiring newer safety and security measures: Urban experts and their approach

The session included the vision of urban aspects, who provided their visions on the challenges ahead in safety and security, the importance of local communities in the co-production of safety and security for all in the next years, and how the role of the police needs to adapt to civil demands in the aftermath.

**Franz Vanderschueren**, Director of Urban Safety, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile, wrapped up the first panel with an emphasis on working on urban budgets and coordination, and reimagining how the police needs to interact with communities in order to co-produce a transparent security system and enhance police legitimacy and accountability.

**Dr. Barbara Holtmann**, author, Safer Community of Opportunity Tool (South Africa) argued for the need to change our relationship, not only with the police, but with the law. A systemic change is essential, since law enforcement is a stakeholder in the city for safety but not *the* stakeholder. This, she stressed, is a very long-term challenge and we need to institutionalize these views of long-term prevention so that we can fix these problems effectively. As we reimagine safety, she argued, we need to take into account mental wellness and the role of women to ensure communities remain healthy.

The issue of mental wellness, she argued, is central to urban safety and was severely lacking in the conversation. As we reimagine safety, we need to take into account mental wellness. The role of women in urban security needs to be enhanced, since







care work and mental health are currently feminized labors and are critical for the recovery.

**Ana Falú** argued that violence is of the utmost concern, and present at all levels of decision-making, and to understand that safety and security often does not mean the same for men and for women. She called to identify how the issues of discrimination intersect with racial, ethnic and religious issues. If we have to think about (post)pandemic effects, she argued, it is critical to build from the local knowledge, as well as from the vast experience of people who work for women's rights. UCLG, UN-Habitat, and Metropolis, she argued, provide us with possibility of replicating experiences, of generating development policies and incorporating our joint learning.

The session was wrapped up by **Juma Assiago**, Specialist/Coordinator – Safer Cities, HR&SIU/Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat, who emphasized how important co-production of safety and security for all is and how critical it will be, moving forward, to understand urban governance and to build a new set of indicators for the delivery of safety and security in cities that can allow us to assess how well the co-production of safety and security works. Finally, he called for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, as a way to provide us with tools to build a new narrative on safety and security, integrating crime prevention in broader urban strategies and interventions. To enhance community engagement with local and regional governments and the police and draw out innovative approaches, UN-Habitat will this year launch an “Annual 40 Days Safer Cities Challenge”, running from the International Day of Peace (21 September) to World Cities Day (31 October) and as part of the 2020’s Decade Campaign for Action.

## **Safer, Secure and democratic societies: Lessons learned from the session**

### **1. Equal societies are safer societies.**

Participants in the session highlighted the relationship between poverty, inequality, and civil unrest. The pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities in many communities, and thus local and regional governments are working to curb these





growing disparities. Through initiatives that aim at ensuring *economic security*, access to food, housing, and basic services. By including communities that live and work in informality in the immediate response, as well as in the recovery plans, local and regional governments are working to build safety and security through an approach that leaves no-one and no place behind.

## **2. Safety and Security needs to be built with our communities**

Throughout the session, participants presented the measures undertaken to ensure that the people that live in our territories are involved in the recovery. Involving invisible and marginalized populations in decision-making is essential not just only to ensure security but also critical to recover trust and to the relationships between our institutions and our communities, the way they are perceived by populations, and the changes necessary in the aftermath.

Co-production of safety and security means, as well, re-evaluating the role of the police departments and safety as a transversal management issue in our cities. Participants highlighted that communities were, in many respects, arguing for change in how police interact with citizens, and local and regional governments need to rise to the challenge of rethinking police responses in the aftermath and working towards a new relationship between the security forces and our communities.

## **3. Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue**

The vast majority of the participants of the session had included an approach to gender violence, and sexual harassment, in the response, acknowledging that confinement situations are particularly dangerous for women who have less means of escaping. Involving women in the recovery means not only plans for preventing gender violence, buy also focusing on including them in the decision-making processes, as well as in the economic recovery, acknowledging that it is women who often are more at risk by their work in the informal economy, and allowing opportunities for women-led businesses to thrive.

## **4. A new multilateralism for a new conception of safety and security**







**Co-production of security** means involving all stakeholders in the response. Participants argued for the importance of the multi-level governance of safety and security, learning from local approaches to co-produce a new framework of safety. Local and regional governments, as closest to citizens, are best positioned to promote alliances with local stakeholders, and thus to start this conversation, but it will be integral to ensure that all spheres of government are involved to co-create a new security once the pandemic is over. The recent adoption of UN systemwide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements at the 1<sup>st</sup> Habitat Assembly provides a useful platform to reimagine public safety through the co-production of safety and security for all.

## Resources

The UN systemwide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements

[https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/03/un\\_systemwide\\_guidelines\\_on\\_safer\\_cities\\_and\\_human\\_settlements.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/03/un_systemwide_guidelines_on_safer_cities_and_human_settlements.pdf)

Peace in our Cities Campaign <https://www.sdg16.plus/peaceinourcities>

Safer Cities and Urban Governance [https://apolitical.co/en/solution\\_article/the-safe-city-is-built-on-inclusive-urban-governance](https://apolitical.co/en/solution_article/the-safe-city-is-built-on-inclusive-urban-governance)

Creating Safer and Inclusive Cities

[https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/dmfile/IDS\\_Safe\\_Cities\\_Position\\_Paper\\_31Oct\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/dmfile/IDS_Safe_Cities_Position_Paper_31Oct_FINAL.pdf)

The Durban Political Declaration:

[https://www.durban2019.uclg.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/UCLG\\_TheDurbanPoliticalDeclaration\\_EN\\_.pdf](https://www.durban2019.uclg.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/UCLG_TheDurbanPoliticalDeclaration_EN_.pdf)

Safer cities for girls initiative (in Spanish) <https://plan-international.es/safer-cities-girls>

UN-Habitat Safer cities programme: <https://uni.unhabitat.org/safer-cities-about/>

Plan International- UN-Habitat Joint Programme on Safer Cities for Girls <https://plan-international.org/ending-violence/safer-cities-girls>





New Urban Agenda, <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf>

Durban Safer Cities programme <https://use.metropolis.org/case-studies/safer-cities-programme>

