



United Nations  
Peacebuilding

# NEWSLETTER

## Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation

El Salvador

Newsletter No. 2





# This multi-actor initiative seeks to prevent violence for public transportation users

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The Project “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation” is implemented by UNDP and UN Women in El Salvador, and financed by the United Nations Peace Building Fund.



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## Masks that seek to prevent Covid-19 and violence against women

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Saving lives. This is the objective of a campaign that promotes the use of masks in public transportation to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and put a stop to all types of violence against women in public spaces.

The campaign called “You Are Not Alone” was launched within the framework of the project “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation,” managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UN Women, with funding from the United Nations’ Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

As part of this initiative, during the second week of September, around five thousand masks with the hashtag #NoEstásSola (#YouAreNotAlone) were handed out, accompanied by a card with the information of the institutions that can be contacted by women who are victims of violence or by their networks of support to report or seek help.



Masks were handed out to users of public transportation.



Masks were handed out to users in the buses



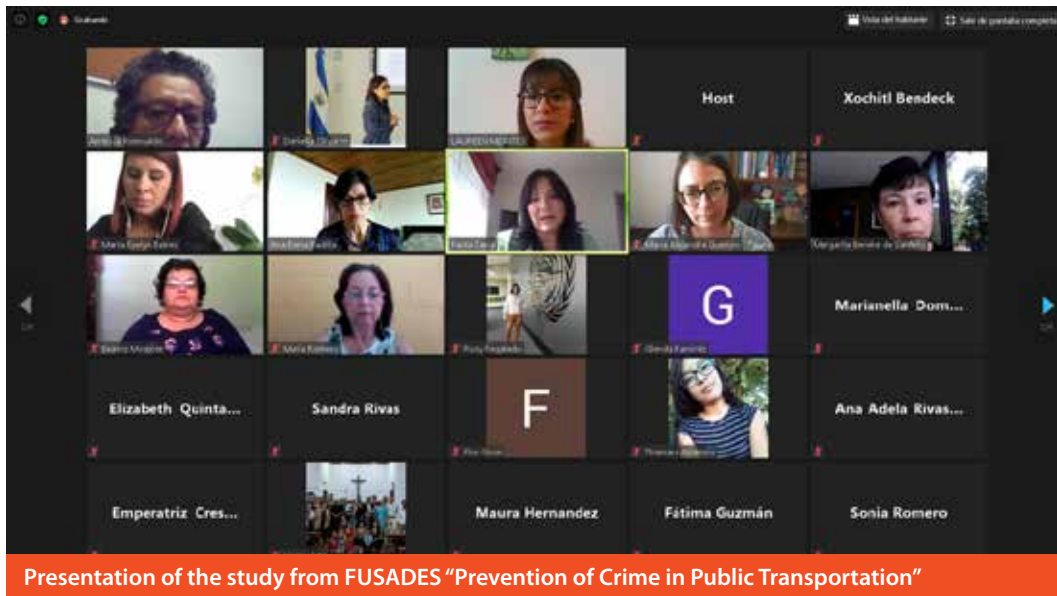
Masks were handed out to people in different bus stops

The masks were handed out during the busiest hours at bus stops in the municipalities of San Salvador (San Salvador) and Santa Tecla (La Libertad), where the pilot of the project is being carried out. Hand sanitizing dispensing structures were also placed in those spaces for two weeks. Information will be provided about what harassment is and the telephone numbers where help can be sought will also be provided.

Likewise, masks and hand sanitizing dispensers were delivered to more than 15 state institutions, including the Legislative Assembly, the Vice Ministry of Transportation, the National Civil Police, the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women, and the Attorney General's Office, in addition to the municipalities of San Salvador and Santa Tecla.

The campaign also had a social media component for 30 days to raise awareness of the population about the problem of violence against women and the required commitment of the whole of society to stop it.

In El Salvador, more than half of the female users of this service have suffered violence on buses. The majority of victims have been teenagers and young adults. The project "Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation" seeks to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of violence against female users of this service. This Project is a multi-stakeholder initiative that incorporates agents from civil society, the private sector, and local and national governments.



## International specialists: Collective action and territorial targeting are key to transportation services free from violence against women

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One in two women has been a victim of violence in public transportation in El Salvador, and the vast majority of them are teenagers and young adults (72.4%). The incidents on their journeys are part of the various manifestations of discrimination, abuse and violence that women experience throughout their entire life cycle.

The low quality of public transportation and the male chauvinist patterns that prevail in society affect this problem, which is common in the Latin American region, where millions of women are exposed to physical and verbal violence, inappropriate approaches, intentional touching, obscene comments and even death, in collective transportation units.





To discuss innovative initiatives and good international practices to address these challenges, the webinar “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation” was held and more than 100 people participated. The activity was part of the project that bears the same name, and which aims to reduce sexual harassment and all forms of violence for female users of public transportation, through the involvement of multiple sectors.

The project “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation” is managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UN Women, with funding from the United Nations’ Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). This Project represents an opportunity to catalyze development of urban mobility policies that promote citizen security with a gender perspective.

The discussion was chaired by the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in El Salvador, Birgit Gerstenberg; the Representative of UN Women in El Salvador, Ana Elena Badilla; and the Vice President of the Parliamentary Group of Women of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, Marta Evelyn Batres.

The panelists were the Specialist of the Transportation Division of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Lauren Montes Calero; the former Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications and current Director of Law at the Central University of Chile, Paola Tapia Salas; the

Coordinator of the Safe Cities Program of UN Women Ecuador, María Alejandra Guerrón; the director of the Center for Research and Statistics of the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú; and the Director of the Salvadoran Women’s Organization Las Dignas, América Romualdo.

The panelists highlighted the importance of building public policies focused on the territory through multisectoral efforts. “This is a problem that we must face in a coordinated and fast way. A systemic problem requires collective leadership and the articulation of the various actors,” said Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú from FUSADES.

On the other hand, Paola Tapia Salas, who was the first female transportation minister in Chile, pointed out that it is important to focus on the diverse realities and the multiple inequalities that impact women in different ways, depending on the places and conditions in which they live. “We must focus on the territory, segment it, point out the differences and based on this, design public policies with the participation of multiple actors,” she expressed. Likewise, the Chilean experience has shown that it is essential to involve women not only as users, but also as workers and agents of change in the public transportation value chain.





**Presentación del Estudio de FUSADES “Prevención del Crimen en el Transporte Público”**

The IDB specialist, Laureen Montes, reiterated that “it is essential to have an intersectoral vision of the challenge we face.” From the Transportation Gender Lab, she said, they promote an exchange of knowledge and good practices in 12 Latin American cities. These cities are implementing actions in four categories: inclusion of the gender perspective in regulations related to transportation, infrastructure and safe services with a gender perspective, awareness-raising campaigns against sexual harassment, and access to justice for women who are victims of sexual harassment.

The specialists also agreed that the closures of public transportation due to the COVID-19 pandemic should be an opportunity to implement

transformations, so that when the service is enabled again, it is safer for women. “It is a space of opportunity to advance in reflection, reorganization, sensibilization and awareness-raising. Influencing the transformation of public transportation will make a significant difference in the lives of women and girls,” noted the UN Resident Coordinator in El Salvador.

“We must ensure that public transportation is a safe service and continue to fight for a more egalitarian and more equitable society, breaking those gaps in a culture that has been naturalizing and deepening,” added Marta Evelyn Batres, the Vice President of the Parliamentary Group of Women of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador.



## Women users of public transportation participate in the co-creation of safe bus stops

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Unsafe, poorly lit and high-risk places. This is how female users of public transportation describe bus stops. Many of them have suffered robberies, touching, sexual harassment and verbal abuse and some of them have been persecuted or have witnessed kidnapping attempts on these sites.

This violence is an extension of what women suffer throughout the public transportation system, specifically in the bus units, where they suffer beatings, abuse, touching and sexual harassment by men, often with the complicity of the drivers. The problem is latent both in cities and in rural areas.

The situation is more complex for women with disabilities, who in addition to suffering violence, often do not find bus units and bus stops that respond to their particular needs, such as Braille signage for vision-impaired people, ramps or infrastructure for people with physical disabilities, or orientation in the bus units for deaf people.



This is reflected in the results of a series of six workshops in which 80 women participated, including girls, teenagers, adults, people with disabilities and young people from the LGBTI population. The workshops were held in San Salvador and Santa Tecla in the format of co-creation laboratories to consult and validate a proposal for the design of bus stops free of gender-based violence.

Cities must be spaces for experimentation and leadership in the transformation towards sustainable development. Co-creation involves social innovation, human-centered design and participatory urban planning.

For this reason, the project “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation in El Salvador” promoted this co-creation process by involving users in urban planning and public spaces, which are generally not designed with safety for women in mind. The Project is managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UN Women, with funding from the United Nations’ Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

The participants in the workshops analyzed the first bus stop design, prepared in accordance with basic guidelines and existing regulations, and shared recommendations in four priority areas: security, infrastructure, accessibility, and proposals for the governing body, that is, for the Vice Ministry of Transportation (VMT).

In terms of security, the participants emphasized the need for an adequate lighting system, as well as efficient video surveillance systems that can capture images that can be considered

as evidence of crimes. They also suggested the establishment of a permanent regulator at bus stops, as well as prioritizing pregnant women, people with disabilities, and the elderly when boarding bus units.

They also contributed innovative ideas such as bus stops that include spaces with different colors that help women communicate any situation of harassment, helping them alert the people who are present or the authorities (through video surveillance) so that women can be provided with immediate assistance as needed. For example, if they are calm, they stand in the color white, and if they feel harassed, they stand in a purple stripe.

The participants consider important to count with the physical presence of VMT personnel and the National Civil Police to guarantee respect on the part of the drivers at the time of boarding, minimize accidents and support users in their particular needs both in the bus stop and when getting on the bus.

The order within the bus stops, through a line organized in order of arrival and respecting the distance between people, was pointed out as relevant in order to avoid touching, harassment and aggression by men while boarding the bus.

They also considered that advertising should be at an appropriate height and with information that can benefit women, for example, emergency numbers or laws that protect women.

In terms of infrastructure, they highlighted the need for amplitude of the bus stops, good lighting, permanent maintenance, good visibility

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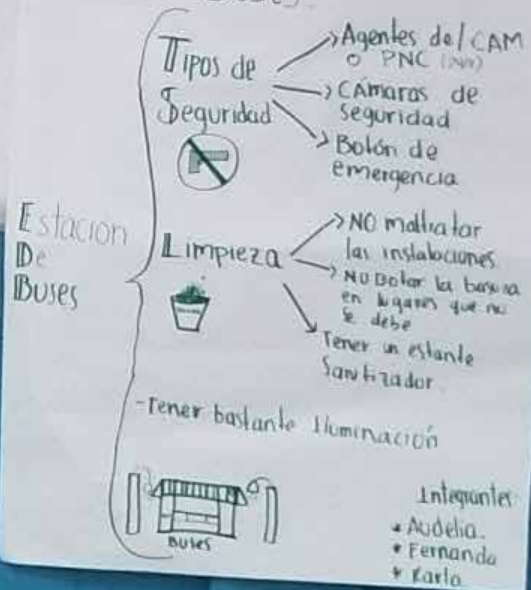
## La Parada que nosotros Queremos!!!

### Parada segura

- Com Iluminacion, visibilidad, camaras, numeros de emergencia, etc.
- seleccionadas para mujeres y niños para identificar
- vigilancia mas frecuente



## Mejoría De Parada De Buses





**Co-creation workshop with women users of public transportation.**



**Current state of bus stops.**

of what happens in the bus stops, adequate signage and information on bus routes and bus lines, signage for vision-impaired people, screens for deaf people, ramps for people with disabilities, modern and inclusive buses, among other proposals.

Among the proposals for the governing body is ensuring that the distribution of bus stops is done in coordination with transportation companies, as well as working on strengthening compliance with the regulations by these transportation companies.

Ultimately, women expect that the competent authorities coordinate efforts with each other and can make a plan for the safety of women in all spaces. The inputs, at the outset, have been taken as the basis for making changes in the original design so that it can respond to the needs and demands of female users of public transportation.

The consultations also revealed important findings to continue working for public transportation free of violence against women. For example, nine out of ten participants were unaware of the national legislation that protects them, that is, the Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence against Women (LEIV); the Law of Equality, Equity and the Eradication of Discrimination against Women (LIE); as well as the Family Code and other laws. Although some participants had heard them mentioned before, they did not know their content.

Five out of ten women did not know what harassment was or they reduced it to physical sexual harassment, without identifying as such the unwanted compliments, verbal expressions or inappropriate proposals. These results demonstrate the importance of carrying out massive campaigns to disseminate the legislation and to raise awareness of the problem.



## Police offices equipped to better care for women victims of violence

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With the aim of strengthening care for female user of public transportation who file complaints about harassment, as well as care for women victims of violence in general, the United Nations contributed with the equipping of two UNIMUJER-ODAC offices, located in the municipalities of Santa Tecla and San Salvador.



The UNIMUJER-ODAC offices are a very important component of the new police model, with a focus on the Community Police philosophy, in which care is provided with quality and warmth to those women who need assistance to make a complaint and who may require psychological care and shelter in case of emergency.

The delivery of equipment was focused on improving the infrastructure of the offices, the conditions in which the officials of these offices carry out their work and the environment for customer service. This included computer and multifunctional equipment; office equipment such as desks, secretarial chairs and waiting area chairs; resources for the children's playroom; and supplies to modernize and comprehensively set up the facilities (such as air conditioning equipment, paint, lamps, electrical equipment, furniture for dining areas, bathrooms and bedrooms).

The equipment was delivered within the framework of the activities of the project "Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation," which seeks to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of violence against female users

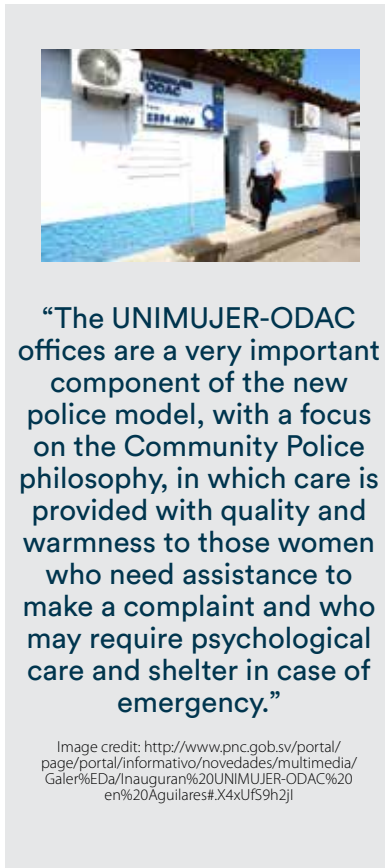
of public transportation. The Project is managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UN Women, with funding from the United Nations' Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

Women, due to their different roles in the Salvadoran society, are the main users of public transportation, and therefore, they are the main victims of the lack of a culture of peace, coexistence and respect in public spaces, especially in public transportation.

Supporting the National Civil Police (PNC) in improving care for female victims of harassment, especially in the processes of taking complaints and investigating acts of violence in public spaces, has been established as one of the results of the Project.

Additionally, the Project will continue supporting other

units of the PNC, such as the Land Traffic Division, 911 and the Gender Unit, in order to strengthen these units in their care services for women victims of violence, with a focus on gender and respect for the human rights of women.







## Training with a gender perspective within the framework of the project «Women Free of Violence in Public Transport»

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Officials from entities related to the transportation service in the country participated in a series of specialized trainings on the gender perspective and how to incorporate it in the exercise of their functions.

Nine courses were organized as part of the strategies to promote safe and violence-free transportation for women. In them, 42 people participated, of which 59% are women.

The participants are part of the teams of the Vice Ministry of Transport (VMT), the Fund for Care to Victims of Traffic Accidents (FONAT) and the land traffic division of the National Civil Police.

The courses were made available through the UN Women virtual platform under the modality of self-learning in order to facilitate learning within the context of mobility



**Platform for the courses.**

restriction measures and confinement due to COVID-19. Officials have finished 50% of the courses and they are committed to completing all of them.

The courses covered topics such as basic concepts of gender, economic empowerment of women, gender violence, gender equality at work and education.

Likewise, in alliance with Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA), a university course called “Gender Violence Prevention and Equality Policies” was carried out, in which VMT and FONAT personnel participated.

The course, which took place from June to September, aimed to promote

the implementation of the gender perspective in social relations as a necessary tool for the prevention of gender violence. At the same time, the course sought to teach about public policies for the prevention of this type of violence and the effectiveness of the implementation of these policies.

The specific topics addressed by the course, which was also developed virtually, were the constitutional environment for the prevention of gender violence, coaching for the prevention of gender violence in the working and social environment, the crime of femicide, and judicial decisions with a gender perspective.



**«Road safety is a matter of public policy; it requires commitment from leaders and authorities.»**

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**Interview with Paola Bardi,  
Director of FONAT**

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The Fund for Care to Victims of Traffic Accidents (FONAT) is part of the project “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation” and is an entity attached to the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation (MOPT).



## **The FONAT has the following essential purposes:**

- A) Deliver a one-time economic benefit to any person who, as a result of a traffic accident, is declared to have some degree of disability, or to their relatives, if the victims are deceased.
- B) Promote public institutions' programs or projects that contribute to the establishment of conditions that favor the incorporation into a productive life of any person who is diagnosed with some degree of disability, temporary or permanent, as a result of a traffic accident.
- C) Endorse, through the National Road Safety Council (CONASEVI), programs and projects related to road safety, education and prevention, in order to prevent and reduce traffic accidents and keep statistics on such accidents.

Due to the FONAT's functions and the direct care that this institution provides to people who have been victims of any traffic accident, including those that have occurred in public transportation units, the FONAT is one of the key institutions for the Project, which seeks to strengthen the institution's gender approach, both in the care it provides and in mainstreaming road safety training, which the institution provides through CONASEVI

## **Why is the project "Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation" important for FONAT?**

Enjoying public transportation in a decent and quality manner is key to guaranteeing safety and a life free of violence for women, teenagers and girls who must go to work or to study or who use it as a means of transportation to comply with their daily chores.

An important factor for the use and enjoyment of this right is to provide tools that improve the safety of the overall environment and public spaces of transportation services, including both bus stops and bus units, so that crimes can be avoided. This must be accompanied by campaigns to raise the awareness of users of public transportation services.

The project "Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation" aims to create mechanisms through which women, teenagers and girls can feel safe not only during the journey they take on public transportation, but also while waiting to board the bus units. In this project, women are not only points-of-reference for consultations; they also participate in the creation of the activities to be carried out. For this reason, FONAT considers it vitally important to coordinate efforts with institutions; public and private organizations, such as UN-WOMEN and UNDP; and even civil society organizations which protect women's rights. Services to citizens must be all-encompassing, creating strategies that prevent female users of public transportation from becoming victims of crime, sexual harassment and other forms of violence.



Personle from FONAT assisting victims of transportation accidents..

### How has FONAT benefited through the project “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation”?

As it is in the public domain, in El Salvador, 90.1% of the population uses public transportation to commute to their daily functions. We know that unrestricted and safe transportation guarantees access to other fundamental rights such as health and education, as well as the enjoyment of public services, including those provided by FONAT. However, it is until now that work is being done to unify efforts to create actions to guarantee safe transportation, especially for women.

Urban mobility that promotes citizen safety in public transportation with a gender perspective is part of the activities and the comprehensive strategies that focus on road safety. In this sense, FONAT, through its purposes, is linked to the transversal axes promoted by the project “Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation” in such a way that we considered that the awareness-raising campaigns and

actions developed in public spaces and inside buses have directly benefited not only the females users who require FONAT services, but also our employees who use this transportation service to go to work.

### As a woman in the field of transportation and the defense of people’s rights, what are your biggest challenges as a civil servant?

Contributing to the creation and implementation of public policies, essentially related to gender, not only with the country’s road safety unit, but also in an all-encompassing way, so that we can propose to the Government of El Salvador public spaces and safer bus routes for women and girls, while joining the articulated efforts of various key actors in the process, such as civil society, the private sector, local governments and the Vice Ministry of Transportation (VMT), as the leading entity in road safety and prevention in the country.



As an official who is part of the National Road Safety Council of El Salvador, I join the actions carried out by those responsible for compliance with public transportation and safety laws, such as the National Civil Police (PNC) and the VMT, in order to generate conditions and regulations that promote safe environments and respect for human rights.

Finally, from the gender unit of FONAT, I participate and lead mechanisms for the promotion of a culture of peace, with knowledge of women rights, within the institution and aimed at females users who require our public services on a daily basis, in order to prevent sexual harassment and violence against women in public spaces.

### **How has the project helped you as a woman leader in transportation matters?**

90% of women have mentioned that they have suffered sexual harassment or have seen another woman being harassed on public transportation. This figure raises an alarm about the seriousness of the issue and the importance for women who hold public office to promote initiatives or actions that demand safety and effectiveness for public spaces and transportation in settings that guarantee safe mobility free from sexual harassment and free of all forms of violence for women, teenagers and girls.



### **What are the future challenges for FONAT?**

As part of the challenges that FONAT has projected for the year 2021, and that will be part of the public policies that will benefit the general public, in strategic areas such as road safety and prevention and care for victims of traffic accidents, we can mention four:

- Timely protection and care (economic and rehabilitation) to victims of road accidents.
- Creation of mechanisms for compliance with Laws on transportation, traffic and road safety.
- Creation and operation of the National Road Safety Observatory
- In view of the importance of data and indicators of the evolution of the accident rate for each country, the creation of National Road Safety Observatories in all countries is recognized as a good practice.

Road safety is a matter of public policy; it requires commitment from leaders and authorities, but, above all, it requires that all perspectives are included at the center of policies, especially the perspective of women.



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## Women Free of Violence in Public Transportation

