

The logo for Spotlight Initiative, featuring a circular arrangement of white dots of varying sizes.

Spotlight
Initiative


A vibrant, stylized illustration of two women standing side-by-side. The woman on the left has purple hair and is wearing a black top and light blue pants. The woman on the right has dark hair in braids and is wearing a green dress with a patterned waistband. They are set against a background of large, green, hole-punched leaves and a warm orange and red gradient. At the bottom, there are several large pink hibiscus flowers.

Rising to the challenge

Impact report 2020-2021



Over **650,000**
women and girls were provided with gender-based violence services despite COVID-19 related constraints and lockdowns



32%
increase in the **national budgets** to prevent violence against women and girls




84
laws and policies have been signed or strengthened across **17 countries**


880,000
men and boys were educated on positive masculinity, respectful family relationships, non-violent conflict resolution and parenting




1 million
young people joined in- and out-of-school programmes



22%
increase in number of **convictions of perpetrators** of violence compared to 2019



More than 65 million
people were reached through 80 locally tailored **behaviour change multimedia campaigns** in more than 15 languages



1,111
local and grassroots women's rights organizations reported having **greater influence** and agency to work on eliminating violence against women and girls




6 new countries



developed methodologies to produce **national data** on violence against women and girls

USD 146 million

allocated to civil society organizations so far (**48%** of activity funds)



Coverphoto: ©Spotlight Initiative/Dariela Torres

The Spotlight Initiative mural in La Ceiba was elaborated with the participation of Garifuna women, who are part of the afro descendent population in Honduras. The mural promotes messages about respect, women's rights and gender equality in Spanish and Garifuna languages. This artwork was done with the support of El Comité de Mujeres de Visitación Padilla.

Meeting the challenges of the **moment**

The COVID-19 global pandemic made 2020 an incomparable year. With national lockdowns and mobility restrictions, and health and support services closed or limited, violence against women and girls escalated at a staggering rate. On 5 April 2020, UN Secretary-General António Guterres sounded the alarm, and urged governments to ensure national COVID-19 response plans included the prevention and redress of gender-based violence. More than 140 countries responded to this call. Yet despite global concern and growing evidence of the situation's severity, the crisis of violence against women and girls deepened.

The Spotlight Initiative was equipped to act. In our third year of operations, our broad base of partnerships helped us quickly identify new ways of working to deliver results for women and girls. Our joint, coordinated efforts across different UN entities enabled us to adapt and respond swiftly and retool programmes as needed. We had the flexibility to shift funds to local and grassroots women's organizations working on the front lines. We had the experience and relationships to influence national COVID-19 response and recovery plans and ensure violence against women and girls was being addressed.

But our work is far from complete. COVID-19 continues to devastate communities across the globe, and women's rights have significantly regressed. Women have been the hardest hit by unemployment, forced into poverty, and widely bear the increased toll of unpaid care responsibilities – all of which increase vulnerabilities to greater violence and exploitation. In the past year, as life has shifted increasingly online, so too has violence, harassment and abuse. As the world continues to weather the worst economic crisis in a century, the rise in gender-based violence and harmful practices, like child marriage, should frighten us all. Girls who marry and stop going to school typically live with fewer opportunities and can face greater risks of domestic violence and health problems – including maternal mortality – feeding a dangerous cycle of oppression, harm and poverty for future generations.

Violence against women and girls may not be new but the opportunities and threats we face today are. 2020 served as a meaningful test of the Spotlight Initiative model and demonstrated that our approach to stemming violence works. We have the model. Now is the time to hasten the pace of change.

Thanks to the European Union and its unprecedented €500 million in seed funding, Spotlight Initiative is the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls. The Initiative is responding to all forms of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on domestic and family violence, sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, femicide, trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation.

2020 was a year in which already high levels of violence against women and girls skyrocketed. Despite the challenges, the Spotlight Initiative has leveraged its comprehensive model and effectively responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in partnership with national governments and civil society.

This report outlines the Spotlight Initiative's key results since 2020.

Together, with more resources, more partners and more political will, we can end violence against women and girls for good.

Our work prioritizes women's rights, leaving no one behind.

Ending discrimination

Engaging marginalized women and girls

Civil society engagement

National ownership

Ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities



Rose Christine Adikini took part in Spotlight Initiative-supported leadership training run by the National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda. Covering confidence, leadership, self-esteem and public speaking, these sessions equip women and girls with disabilities with essential knowledge about their rights and entitlements, as well as the skills to advocate for those rights.

Spotlight Initiative:

Around the world



Latin America

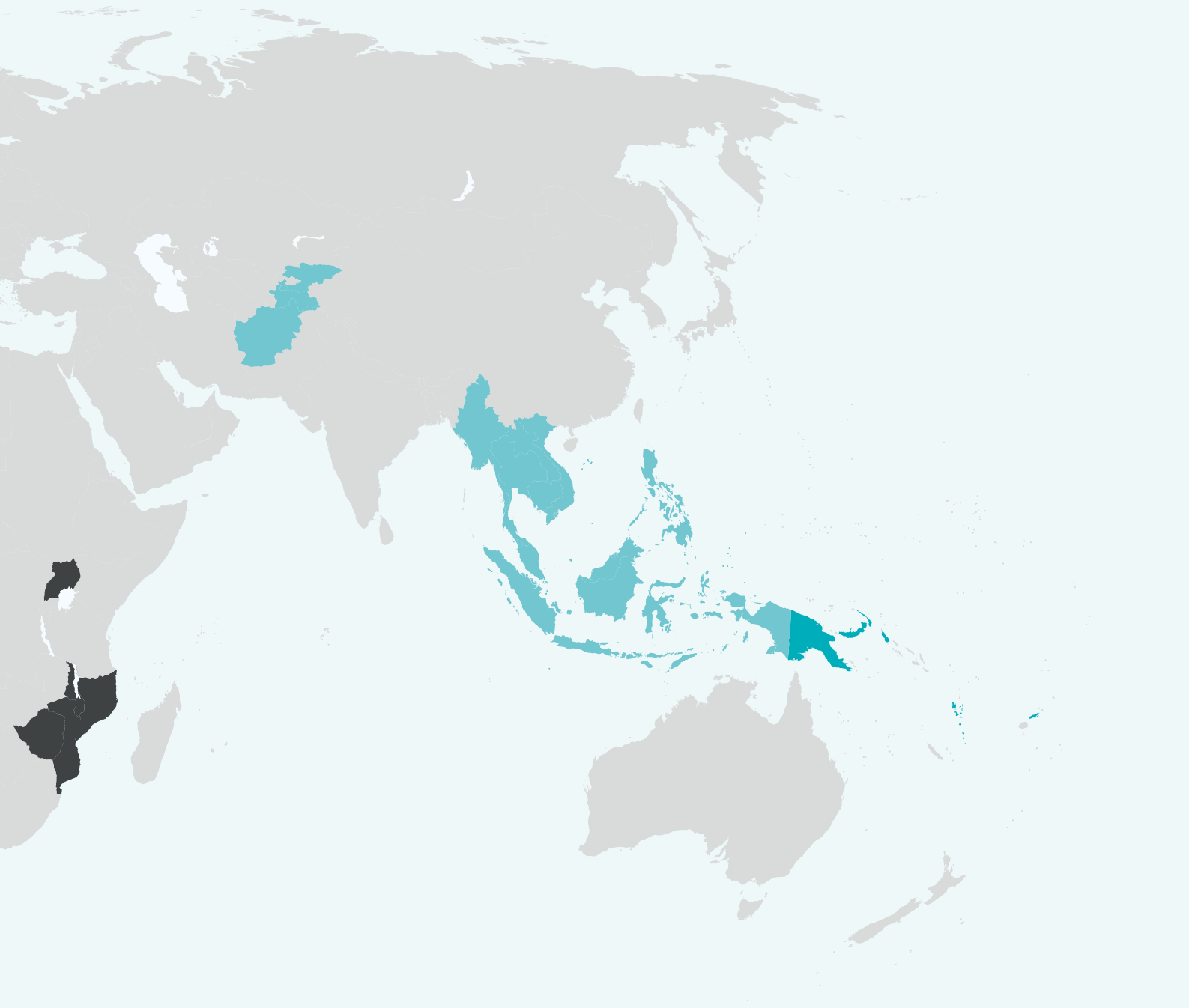
Latin America regional programme, Argentina, El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico.

Caribbean

Caribbean regional programme, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago.

Africa

Africa regional programme, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Mozambique, Uganda, Zimbabwe.



Asia

ASEAN regional Safe and Fair programme: (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam), Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan.

Pacific

Pacific regional programme, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu.

How we work

The Spotlight Initiative is unique. Thanks to the European Union's generous seed funding, we are the first global effort to make a significant investment in eliminating violence against women and girls – with the understanding that it is a necessary precondition and driver to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Nearly USD 300 million has been distributed to Spotlight Initiative programmes globally since 2018.

The bulk of those funds – USD 169 million – was distributed in 2020 as we worked to boost prevention and increase support to victims and survivors of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. To better serve the hardest-to-reach women and girls and leverage the sustainability and transformation that comes from investing in civil society, we use two grant-making programmes – the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund – in addition to our 32 country and regional programmes, to fund smaller organizations in local communities. Grassroots organizations are priorities for the Spotlight Initiative because of their work with

those directly impacted by violence and the important trust and credibility they have built within communities.

The Spotlight Initiative works in support of regional and national institutions and their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We co-create all of our programmes with governments and ensure activities are aligned with local priorities. We work with legislative and judicial bodies to bring about systemic change in legal frameworks and practices that impact violence against women and girls, especially at the state, district and community levels.

Our comprehensive model also engages a wide range of social and cultural partners, such as academia, media, influencers, religious institutions, traditional leaders and the private sector.

As a model fund for UN Reform, the Spotlight Initiative aims to prove the power of working in a more coordinated and integrated way across the United Nations System to deliver our activities with a truly diverse set of stakeholders.

Delivering on the SDGs

In 2020, the Spotlight Initiative launched its first mid-term assessment, which focused on our initial 13 programmes in Africa and Latin America and surveyed more than 700 stakeholders from governments, civil society, the European Union and United Nations. Preliminary findings are incredibly positive and confirm the validity of our overall approach. More than 90 per cent of those surveyed agreed that the Spotlight Initiative supports the UN's ability to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, with more integrated, efficient and better coordinated UN country teams. The programmes received high ratings in effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.



The founding partnership between the United Nations and the European Union lies at the heart of the Spotlight Initiative. Together, these two organizations have pooled their resources and expertise to implement stronger, well-integrated programmes and offer a new model of multilateral partnership.

Keeping **civil society** at the centre

In 2020, the Spotlight Initiative made even greater strides to deepen its partnerships with grassroots and local organizations. Since our inception, these civil society organizations have been among our chief collaborators. In fact, civil society is represented at every phase of Spotlight Initiative programming, from design and implementation, to monitoring, decision-making and governance.

Evidence shows that transformative change happens from the ground up, over time, and is driven by organizations and progressive social movements closest to those directly impacted by violence.¹ The pandemic also highlighted the importance of locally driven solutions, and the vital role civil society can play in ensuring the voices of marginalized women are heard and included.

©UNDP/Laufa Lesa



1,111

local and grassroots women's rights organizations reported having greater influence and agency to work on eliminating violence against women and girls.

Yet, these important actors 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.² Most funding tends to go to international organizations based in donor countries rather than local organizations leading their own, context-specific solutions.

To address this gap, the Spotlight Initiative delivers 30 to 50 per cent of its programmatic funds through civil society organizations, with the majority targeting national, local and grassroots women's rights organizations. To date, the Spotlight Initiative has allocated USD 146 million to civil society organizations.

With COVID-19, the need for more flexible funding became even clearer, as these groups stretched to meet the urgent needs of women and girls in their communities. The Spotlight Initiative quickly reassigned millions of dollars in small grants to grassroots organizations globally that are traditionally left out of mainstream funding opportunities.

Our year-end results prove that working with and supporting grassroots organizations is transformative.

1 S. Laurel Weldon & Mala Htun, *Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552074.2013.802158>.

2 OECD, (March, 2019). *Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Donor Charts*. Available online: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-to-gender-equality-donor-charts-2019.pdf>.

3 https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/sites/default/files/publication/2April2020_Joint_UN-EU_response_to_CMI_SIGNED_EU_and_UN.pdf

The Count Me In! Consortium is a coalition of intersectional feminist groups that has supported the Spotlight Initiative and its civil society partners since 2017, helping to make our processes more transparent and inclusive to ensure that no one is left behind.

In 2018, the consortium made 18 formal recommendations regarding the accessibility of Spotlight Initiative funding, based on consultations with more than 600 feminist and women's rights advocates. In 2020, it was announced that the Spotlight Initiative had adopted these recommendations and developed plans to better reach and engage local and grassroots organizations as implementing partners.³ While these efforts are ongoing, Count Me In! wrapped up its work in 2020, confident that partnering with feminist activists remains central to our programming.

“The progress made in ending violence against women and girls is thanks to the boundless work of civil society, in particular the local, community-based, grassroots women’s rights organizations, groups and movements, who will continue doing this important work after the Initiative.”

– Dr. Natalia Kanem, United Nations Population Fund Executive Director, Global Civil Society Consultation, 11 March 2020

**USD 146 MILLION
ALLOCATED TO CIVIL
SOCIETY, WOMEN'S AND
GRASSROOTS
ORGANIZATIONS
SO FAR**



Institutions

lead the way

Our success hinges on the willingness of governments to lead by setting national priorities, guiding ministries and other institutions, and mobilizing their citizens to end violence against women and girls.

In 2020, many countries had to rewrite plans and strategies to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. With this course correction, more countries integrated efforts to address violence against women and girls in their work. The Spotlight Initiative helped design 88 such strategies, plans and programmes in 19 countries.

National and local institutions also play critical roles in ensuring that laws and policies are adequately implemented. In 2020, in partnership with the Spotlight Initiative, more countries increased budgets to eliminate violence against women and girls, and strengthened their capacity to address the problem.

The percentage of national budgets dedicated to ending gender-based violence increased by

32%

©United Nations/Albert Gonzalez Farran



In September 2020, Liberian President George Weah declared rape a national emergency, appointing a special prosecutor for rape, and establishing a National Sex Offender Registry and a National Security Taskforce on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. An initial allocation of USD 2 million was made by the government to roll out a Roadmap on Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2020-2022.



SDGs
Global Goals

Community Center

Spotlight Initiative
I'M A
WOMEN &
GIRLS' RIGHTS
ADVOCACY
CHAMPION
DEAN

Spotlight Initiative
I'M A
WOMEN &
GIRLS' RIGHTS
ADVOCACY
CHAMPION
DEAN

Spotlight Initiative
I'M A
WOMEN &
GIRLS' RIGHTS
ADVOCACY
CHAMPION
DEAN

Spotlight Initiative
I'M A
WOMEN &
GIRLS' RIGHTS
ADVOCACY
CHAMPION
DEAN

Spotlight Initiative
I'M A
WOMEN &
GIRLS' RIGHTS
ADVOCACY
CHAMPION
DEAN

Accessing essential **services**

The steep increase in survivors seeking services – 83 per cent – speaks to the horrific increase in violence in 2020. But it is also a sign that our efforts to better connect survivors with essential services and support are working. Timely access to quality, comprehensive services can significantly help break cycles of violence.

Innovation and adaptation were critical as the world tried to deliver essential services amidst lockdowns, movement restrictions, and social distancing policies. To ensure operations and rapid response services continued, the

Spotlight Initiative quickly embraced remote and mobile opportunities. Our programmes began connecting more survivors to hotlines, tele-counselling, and virtual courts to support their recovery and hold perpetrators accountable. We also created more “one stop” centres to provide women and girls with medical, police, legal and psychosocial services in one convenient place.

Over
650,000

women and girls were provided
with gender-based violence
services despite COVID-19
related constraints and
lockdowns

Private sector partners also joined the effort. In Mexico, our partnership with one of the country’s largest hotel chains, Grupo Posadas, led to the provision of free accommodation to women and girls who were experiencing violence.



“The COVID-19 pandemic has made everything much more difficult for survivors of violence. They cannot easily make a call or even send a text message to hotlines because they are at home with their abuser all the time. We get many calls late at night or early in the morning while the abuser is sleeping. For this reason, we had to open the hotline number 24/7 so we don’t miss an urgent call for help. Support [from the Spotlight Initiative] was extremely timely as it meant we could hire more hotline operators like me for the night shift.”

– A hotline operator for a shelter that supports women and girls experiencing violence in Viet Nam



©UNICEF/Daniele Volpe

In Jamaica, the Spotlight Initiative supported the expansion of a psychological tele-counselling programme that matches women and girls experiencing intimate partner violence or abuse with a “mentor mom” – a fellow survivor of violence – for peer-to-peer support.

The power of data

Quality data that is reliable, comparable, and disaggregated by gender, type of violence, and population is essential. Data determines policies, programmes and budgets, and drives our very understanding of violence against women and girls.

The good news is that more countries today have data on gender-based violence – and know how to use it strategically – than ever before. Seventy-four per cent of the countries

we partner with now have publicly available data on intimate partner violence, 57 per cent have regularly reported data on female genital mutilation, and 60 per cent are reliably tracking child marriage.

The Spotlight Initiative continues to work closely with governments and other institutions to better collect and use data in line with international standards to ensure we have the clearest picture of violence possible.



The number of
perpetrators convicted
of gender-based
violence increased by

22%

compared to the
previous year.

Making the **legal case**

Supportive policies and legislation are the foundation of any genuine effort to promote women's rights and address violence against women and girls effectively.

The Spotlight Initiative works with national partners to develop and strengthen such policies and legislation, and help ensure proper implementation. In 2020, our work led to 84 newly signed or strengthened laws that support gender equality or the elimination of gender-based violence in 17 countries.

Too often, local communities are not familiar with these important laws. We are increasingly partnering with religious and traditional leaders and cultural influencers to help raise awareness about women's legal rights, as well as grow support for new legislation on violence against women and girls and harmful practices.

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.

In Malawi, Spotlight Initiative contributed to public litigation efforts in the renowned Msundwe case, which resulted in groundbreaking legal precedents to protect women and girls from sexual violence perpetrated by local police. This included the award of compensation to victims, minimum standards for service provision and investigation, and the establishment of a credible body to oversee these types of cases.



84

**laws and policies
have been signed or
strengthened across
17 countries.**



Changing

minds and attitudes

Rooted in inequality, violence against women and girls is fed by pervasive discriminatory attitudes, social norms and destructive behaviours that are all too commonplace in our world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further fuelled these risk factors, as well as challenged our regular prevention efforts. So our work has intensified and we keep adapting and looking to innovative strategies to draw more attention to gendered discrimination and change the beliefs and practices that keep it alive.

In 2020, the Spotlight Initiative launched 80 public information campaigns in 19 countries, reaching more than 65 million people in at least

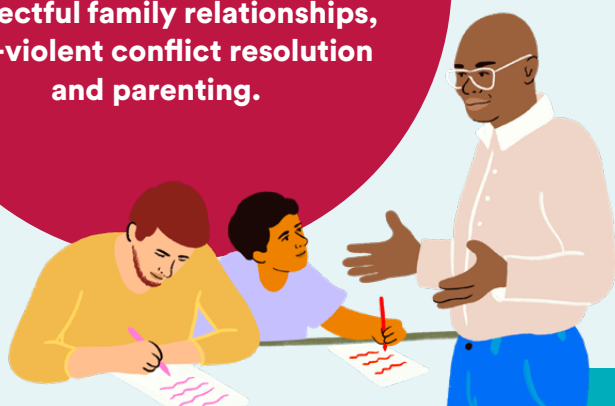
15 different languages. Grounded by research in what works, our campaigns disseminate locally designed messages through various platforms, including television, the internet, social media, printed publications, billboards and radio. Many of the messages inform women and girls of their rights and available services, and aim to shift the harmful norms and practices that perpetuate violence.

While much of our work utilizes mass media and digital technologies, we continue to use time-honoured ways of mobilizing people and discussing issues. In many countries, we co-design communication strategies with traditional and religious leaders, who are powerful influencers in their local communities. We use theatre, music, public debates, sports, and other creative ways to initiate social dialogues. We also collaborate with civil society, particularly women's rights organizations, to promote movement-building that will increase public support for gender equality.

Evidence shows that comprehensive sexuality education, both in and out of school, is essential to tackling the root causes of violence against women and girls. High-quality sexuality education equips young people with essential knowledge about their rights, consent and respectful relationships, while teaching that gender-based violence is a violation of human rights. Despite widespread school closures

880,000

men and boys were educated on positive masculinity, respectful family relationships, non-violent conflict resolution and parenting.





©Spotlight Initiative/Mr. Luuf

In many countries, taxis are often used by women to escape abusive situations. In Niger, taxi drivers who attended gender sensitization sessions wore orange scarves to show their commitment to creating safe spaces for women and girls and connecting those who have experienced violence with the support they need. “As a man and as a taxi driver, I would like to draw attention to the issue of violence against women and girls. Everyone, especially men and boys, must [take action to] stop the perpetuation of violence against women and girls,” said Mr. Abass Mahaman Abarchi, a former middle school teacher who now works as a taxi driver.

during the pandemic, the Spotlight Initiative reached nearly one million young people in 2020 with programmes addressing sexual and reproductive health and violence, as well as gender and power dynamics more broadly.

For prevention efforts to truly succeed, engaging men and boys is critical. We promote an integrated approach across all of our programmes that engages both men and women in discussions around inequitable gender norms and changing negative attitudes and behaviours.

One million

young people joined in- and out-of-school programmes.



While changes in attitudes can appear quickly, we know from our work that impacting social norms and behaviours is a long-term strategy. And backlashes against women’s rights – as we have been witnessing globally – can swiftly set back progress. The Spotlight Initiative is committed to supporting sustained efforts that finally dismantle the cycles of violence against women and girls.

More than

65 million

people were reached through 80 locally tailored, behaviour-change multimedia campaigns in more than 15 languages.

Online violence

As much of the world moved online to conduct professional, educational and social interactions during the pandemic, violence against women and girls followed. Online violence today includes physical threats, sexual harassment, stalking, non-consensual image sharing, sex trolling, bullying and more. These virtual examples further demonstrate how violence is used today to police gender norms and stereotypes and entrench inequality.

In Kyrgyzstan, Spotlight Initiative supported the development of “Spring in Bishkek”, a mobile game aimed at young people that explores the issue of bride kidnapping. Players are put in the shoes of a university student whose friend has been kidnapped. As they navigate this virtual world, they learn about the impacts of bride kidnapping, legislation that protects the rights of girls, and how to report an abduction. The game has been downloaded more than 100,000 times.





©Spotlight Initiative

In Samoa, women participated in a traditional dance that celebrates self-worth, pride and confidence as part of the Spotlight Initiative’s “16 Days of Healing” campaign in December 2020.

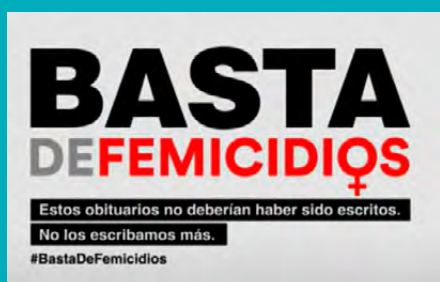
The Pacific region has some of the world’s highest recorded rates of violence against women and girls, with almost two out of every three women impacted by physical or sexual violence in their lifetime – double the global average.

The Spotlight Initiative launched its Pacific Regional Programme in 2020 with a focus on addressing domestic violence and intimate partner violence.

Growing influence

Given the universality of violence against women and girls, the Spotlight Initiative partners with celebrities, influencers and other popular figures to expand our reach both within and beyond our programme countries. With more people spending time online during the pandemic, we leveraged the power of the internet to boost global awareness. One example is our #WithHer campaign, which highlights the work of activists around the world who are helping to eliminate violence against women and girls in their communities.

We also partnered with the Social Good Club to educate more celebrities, content creators and social media influencers on the issues of violence against women and girls and encourage them to use their platforms to influence for change. Together, we created a guide called “The Culture Change Commitment” that helps awaken influencers to systemic misogyny and how to ensure their content does not perpetuate it.



In Argentina, Spotlight Initiative partnered with one of the largest national media and news companies, Clarín Group, to design a media campaign called “Obituarios” (obituaries). The effort gathered the obituaries of more than 300 victims of femicide during the previous year in Argentina, and published them across all Clarín Group media, including Clarín, the country’s largest newspaper and the second most-circulated paper in the Spanish-speaking world. The aim of the campaign was to give the horrifying data a human face and position gender-based violence on the national political agenda.

Facing a **new normal**






Before COVID-19, violence against women and girls was already one of the world's greatest human rights violations. Today, the world must contend not only with the continuing pandemic and other global crises, but with its regressive impacts on women's rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

With a now-proven model of effectiveness, the Spotlight Initiative is ready to accelerate our work. **But we need your help. To expand our critical efforts in new and existing countries, we are looking for partners, funds and action to build Spotlight Initiative into a truly global movement for change.**

Spotlight Initiative's success in responding to COVID-19 in 2020 is evidence that our comprehensive and locally owned approach works.

This way of working must be our new normal. Today, and until violence against women and girls is a thing of the past.

Come partner with us

-  info@spotlightinitiative.org
-  spotlightinitiative.org
-  [@GlobalSpotlight](https://twitter.com/GlobalSpotlight)
-  [@TheSpotlightInitiative](https://www.facebook.com/TheSpotlightInitiative)
-  [@spotlightinitiative](https://www.instagram.com/spotlightinitiative)

Our Global Advocates



“As adults, we have the responsibility to educate ourselves and change the language we use in society so our children can learn differently - for girls to know that they are entitled to equality and for boys to know that there is space for everyone at the table.”

– Cecilia Suárez
Actress
UN Global Advocate for
Spotlight Initiative

“I think we, as sportsmen, coaches and fans, can play a role in ending violence against women by using our voice and by making sure we are keeping each other accountable, and that our behaviours and words do not contribute to gender-based violence.”

Siya Kolisi
Professional rugby union player
UN Global Advocate for
Spotlight Initiative



COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

PARTNERSHIP

GENDER EQUALITY

#WITHHER

INTERSECTIONALITY

BETTER DATA

**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

innovation

MOVEMENT-BUILDING

ADVOCACY

PARTICIPATION

education

transformative

**SOCIAL
CHANGE**

YOUTH

WOMEN'S RIGHTS = HUMAN RIGHTS

 info@spotlightinitiative.org

 spotlightinitiative.org

 [@GlobalSpotlight](https://twitter.com/GlobalSpotlight)

 [@TheSpotlightInitiative](https://www.facebook.com/TheSpotlightInitiative)

 [@spotlightinitiative](https://www.instagram.com/spotlightinitiative)



**Funded by
the European Union**