# Overview

This fact sheet has been prepared to assist you in designing gender-sensitive community safety projects.

People experience public spaces differently based on their gender, sex and sexuality. It has been found that overlapping combinations of identities such as age, race, culture, gender, location or religion (also referred to as ‘intersectionality’) have been found to increase vulnerability and discrimination in the experience of cities/urban environments. For example, a woman from an ethnic minority background who is also living with disability may face multiple challenges and fears when moving through public space.

Although design alone can’t resolve all social challenges (and policies to address root causes of violence should also be pursued), the look and feel of public space has been found to facilitate social behaviour that improves marginalised people’s experiences and perceptions of safety in public spaces. This can increase their willingness to fully participate in community life and their perceptions of safety in public spaces.

Recent Victorian research has shown women are more concerned than men about robbery and harassment, with women from diverse cultural backgrounds indicating heightened worry about their safety in public.[[1]](#endnote-2) Addressing perceptions of safety is key, as fear can cause diverse groups to withdraw from public life, impacting their access to public amenities, schools, jobs, recreation and healthcare.

Research in Melbourne has also shown that many women feel unsafe in public due to prior experiences ranging from unwanted attention, harassment and being followed, to physical and sexual assault.[[2]](#endnote-3)

Safety interventions in the built environment that might seem logical to address crime and perceptions of safety may not have the desired effect. For example, the presence of CCTV cameras may make some people more concerned about their safety while doing little to deter crime. Similarly, and contrary to expectations, “very bright and over lit spaces do not correlate with young women’s perceptions of urban safety”.[[3]](#endnote-4)

When designing solutions, it is important to consult widely in the community to consider place-based approaches and identify whether interventions are likely to increase feelings of safety and whether there is evidence to support their impact on crime reduction.

# Engaging the community

When creating liveable urban spaces, it is vital to include diverse voices in the planning, design and policy solution process. These voices are currently under-represented in decision-making process and in the professions responsible for designing and shaping cities.

Below are some ways you can engage with the community:

* Engage a lighting or gender specialist to conduct night-time walking consultations with local women’s groups and gain insight into how they experience and use your site in hours of darkness.[[4]](#endnote-5)
* Use targeted crowdsourcing platforms to locate places where women feel unsafe.
* Co-design – bring planners, urban designers, landscape architects, and other specialists into direct contact with women and their stories at the start of the design process.[[5]](#endnote-6)
* Consider the space as part of a broader place-making approach.[[6]](#endnote-7)
* Conduct a bus tour of the area with a focus on a gendered perspective considering questions such as: Who is using sporting facilities, parks and transport and how are they using them? Where are the carparks in relation to employment hubs, hospitals and other key services? Which parts of the city look uninviting and poorly lit? What social activities are taking place that are inviting to women?
* Find out who is using the space and what their aims are in using it at all hours of the day. Define the needs of the people using the space first and then look for technical solutions.
* Make specific effort to seek out the voices of diverse and marginalised women.

**Other questions and factors to consider**

**What are the benefits of gender sensitive design?**

"*In a truly inclusive, universal place women feel safe, children run and play, the elderly can sit and socialise, teenagers can chat with friends, and singles can read in comfort. Everyone can be their best self, feel comfortable and be at peace with their neighbour.*"8

Consider the time taken to consult with community as an investment in the future safety of the space, and in the wellbeing of the community. This conversation should not happen just once, but repeatedly throughout the design process, with continued conversation after the design has been completed.9

* Transport links and movement through the space – how will people get there? Are there clearly defined pathways and signs?
* What is the change between daytime and night-time experiences in spaces? What effect do the colours and textures of the location have on the feel of the space in hours of darkness? How does the lighting change feelings of safety and experiences in a place after dark?
* Are there opportunities for encouraging social interaction that are responsive to the needs of women such as seating that allows face to face interaction, outdoor dining that provides space for strollers/prams, and safe spaces for breastfeeding?
* How can art and/or technology be harnessed to improve the space for diverse and marginalised women? E.g. murals, sculptures, projections, interactive or artistic lighting.
* Are play spaces aimed at activities perceived as masculine? Could they be enhanced to be more inclusive for other kinds of activities? For example, Vienna’s parks have calm zones for socialisation and girls only retreat spaces.[[7]](#endnote-8)
* Make traditionally male-dominated spaces such as skate parks more accessible and inviting to girls through a mix of design and purposeful activation (girls’ training sessions or competitions).
* How well-used is the route or space? If it is very well used it will be important to consider how the flow of foot-traffic or patterns of use will be impacted by any proposed redesign.

**Where can I get more information?**

Monash University’s XYX Lab – Gender + Place:  
[www.monash.edu/mada/research/labs/xyx](https://www.monash.edu/mada/research/labs/xyx)

World Bank Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design (2020): [openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33197](https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33197)

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #5:

[www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality)

Habitat International Coalition’s *World Charter for the Right to the City*:  
[hic-gs.org/document.php?pid=2422](http://hic-gs.org/document.php?pid=2422)

Plan International’s *Free to Be* mapping research project: [planfreetobe.org](http://planfreetobe.org/)

The Community Council for Australia’s *The Australia We Want* Report  
[www.communitycouncil.com.au/content/australia-we-want-second-report](http://www.communitycouncil.com.au/content/australia-we-want-second-report)

1. [Lee, Wickes & Jackson 2020](https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/21903), see also [Community Council of Australia 2019](https://www.communitycouncil.com.au/sites/default/files/Australia-we-want-Second-Report_ONLINE.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.plan.org.au/freetobe> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. <https://theconversation.com/more-lighting-alone-does-not-create-safer-cities-look-at-what-research-with-young-women-tells-us-113359> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. See [Fact sheet: Designing better lighting](https://www.crimeprevention.vic.gov.au/resources/urban-design-and-crime/fact-sheet-designing-better-lighting) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. <https://theconversation.com/to-design-safer-parks-for-women-city-planners-must-listen-to-their-stories-98317> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. See [Fact sheet: Apply a placemaking approach](https://www.crimeprevention.vic.gov.au/resources/urban-design-and-crime/fact-sheet-applying-a-placemaking-approach) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. [Vienna Park Design Guidelines, Austria](https://behavioralscientist.org/how-better-urban-planning-can-improve-gender-equality/)

   8 [Jacqueline Bleicher of Global Urban Design](https://urbact.eu/gender-sensitive-public-space-placemaking-and-spatial-justice-through-perspective-gender)

   9 <https://urbact.eu/gender-sensitive-public-space-placemaking-and-spatial-justice-through-perspective-gender> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)