

End-of-Year Management Letter on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Reporting of SEA Allegations

In accordance with Section 4.6 of the Secretary-General’s Bulletin on “Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” (ST/SGB/2003/13), and with paragraph 10 of the UN Women Executive Board Decision 2018/3 which requests that UN Women management, as required by the Secretary- General, present its annual certification to the Executive Board at each annual session, I, Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, hereby certify that UN Women has reported to the Secretary-General all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse that have been brought to its attention and has taken all appropriate measures to address such allegations, in accordance with established rules and procedures for dealing with cases of misconduct.

Furthermore, in line with the Secretary-General’s priorities, I certify that UN Women has:

- i) placed the rights and dignity of victims at the centre and properly sought to address their needs by proactively following up to ensure that every reported victim – with their consent – has received assistance and support, in a manner consistent with the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel;
- ii) been resolute on ending impunity, by ensuring accountability through prompt reporting, timely and victim-centred assessment and investigation of all allegations it received¹, and that where an allegation is substantiated, the matter has been addressed consistently in accordance with UN Women’s staff rules, regulations and administrative issuances;
- iii) appointed PSEA focal points in 100% of country offices and has been proactive in conducting awareness raising activities for its staff members and related personnel,² regarding the prohibition of SEA and ways of reporting such acts. This year 78% of its staff members have completed induction or refresher training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and were reminded of their individual obligation to report any incidents of SEA; and

¹ All allegations that came to our attention were properly assessed, however not all result in a full investigation.

² For the purpose of this letter, the term “United Nations staff and related personnel” includes United Nations staff members, individual consultants/contractors, interns, United Nations Volunteers and affiliated personnel.

- iv) actively and continuously communicated and advocated on issues relating to PSEA, engaged in/joined outreach efforts to raise awareness about PSEA among the communities we serve, and implemented effective ways of reporting such allegations of SEA.

Furthermore, UN Women has actively engaged with Member States, civil society and/or other partners on PSEA and pursued all appropriate means to ensure the effective protection of populations against sexual exploitation and abuse.

In addition, UN Women has reinforced its efforts to manage risks of sexual exploitation and abuse when establishing funded partnerships.

UN Women ensured that its civil society organization partners³ were assessed on their capacity to prevent and respond to SEA. Based on the assessment, partners received capacity strengthening support as required to ensure PSEA systems are in place.

UN Women has also completed the annual Action Plan for measures undertaken to prevent and respond to SEA and conducted appropriate risk assessments for each of its operations and programmes, has acted upon the results, and continues to review these on an ongoing basis.

UN Women is committed to zero tolerance to sexual exploitation and abuse, to treating every allegation seriously and pursuing appropriate action. Therefore, UN Women has dedicated key efforts to ensure that:

UN Women's implementing partners have minimum standards in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse

UN Women's implementing partner policy framework incorporates the requirements of the UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners (the Protocol), which is aligned with ST/SGB/2003/13, thus ensuring adequate safeguards and appropriate action related to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Additionally, in August 2023, UN Women promulgated its new Programme Partner Management Policy, the aim of which is to establish a comprehensive, principle-based framework that is cohesive and uniform in its approach toward managing programme partners. The PSEA-specific obligations for partners have also been incorporated therein, further embedding them into the policy and governance structures as a priority area.

To track progress in the effective tackling of SEA with implementing partners, UN Women's corporate and country-level PSEA action plan indicators include concrete targets and benchmarks related thereto. In addition, UN Women's newly developed indicators and metrics

³ At this time, the requirement of screening partners on PSEA, as enshrined in the 2018 Protocol, has only been implemented for civil society partners through the 2020 Harmonized Implementation Tool on PSEA capacity. It is intended for the assessment process to be expanded to cover additional partners in the near future.+

framework includes metrics dedicated to the prevention of SEA with implementing partners, which provide additional data points for the measuring of success thereof, as well as highlight priority areas for improvement.

Mechanisms are established to address a victim/survivor-centred approach

A victim/survivor-centred approach, which ensures that the specific rights and wishes of those affected thereby are respected at all times, has been implemented into all UN Women efforts to tackle SEA.

UN Women's scenario-based SEA training workshops include a module that discusses a victim/survivor-centred approach to which micro-learning modules on power dynamics and intersectionality were added. UN Women's PSEA focal point capacity building initiative covers a detailed exploration of how a victim/survivor-centred approach can be operationalized at country level.

When an allegation of SEA is reported, UN Women's investigative body, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), ensures that the victims/survivors are at the heart of the investigation and that the process respects the difficulties victims/survivors experience coming forward with a complaint, including making certain that the process is clearly explained to them, facilitating support pathways, conducting sensitive interviews, and keeping victims/survivors informed of the outcome of the investigation.

Assistance for the victims/survivors is provided as soon as UN Women is made aware of an allegation, upon consent of the affected individual, through UN Women's established victim/survivor-assistance mechanism⁴.

UN Women's newly developed indicators and metrics framework, as well as its corporate and country-level action plan, measure progress achieved in the operationalization a victim/survivor-centred approach.

I recognize that leadership, transparency and accountability are essential to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse within the United Nations system and hereby certify that I have exercised my duties in this regard diligently, in good faith and to the very best of my abilities.



Sima Bahous

Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director

31 January 2024

⁴ In line with UN Women's established victim assistance mechanisms and gender-based violence referral pathway.