

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 [...], 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
- 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.

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.

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, thus ensuring adequate safeguards and appropriate action related to SEA by incorporating PSEA assessments and capacity strengthening measures into its Risk-based Capacity Assessment process.

In 2024, UN Women began updating its Selection of Programme Partners Procedure to align with the Inter-agency Common Assessment Tool available on the UN Partner Portal for Programme Partners, with finalization expected in 2025. Moreover, throughout the year, UN Women's in-country PSEA and SH focal points have provided ongoing training and support to implementing partners, in close collaboration with the respective programme managers, helping them understand and fulfill their PSEA obligations throughout all stages of programming.

To track progress, corporate and country-level PSEA action plans, along with UN Women's indicators and metrics framework, include specific targets and benchmarks for PSEA with partners. Additionally, a harmonized reporting template introduced in 2024, developed with UNOPS, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNDP, includes a dedicated indicator.

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.+

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

UN Women upholds a victim/survivor-centred approach, prioritizing the rights, dignity, and wishes of those affected by SEA. This approach is integrated into PSEA training, investigations, and assistance mechanisms to ensure sensitive and effective support.

Scenario-based SEA learning workshops include modules on victim/survivor-centred approach. In summer 2024, a specialized capacity building workshop was delivered to equip PSEA focal points with advanced skills to deliver compassionate and effective victim assistance at the country level.

When SEA allegations are reported, UN Women, through the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), ensures a sensitive and respectful investigative process, which includes clear communication of procedures to victims/survivors, trauma-informed interviews, and regular progress updates.

Victim/survivor assistance mechanisms remain a cornerstone of this approach, which is promptly provided, upon consent, in alignment with the United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, through referrals to legal, medical, psychosocial, and safety services facilitated by UN Women's in-country PSEA focal points, in collaboration with Elimination of Violence Against Women specialists, UN Country Teams (UNCTs), and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs).

UN Women's indicators and metrics framework, as well as its corporate and country-level action plan, measure progress achieved in the operationalization of a victim/survivor-centred approach. In addition, the 2024 introduced harmonized reporting template includes a dedicated set of indicators to measure the effective implementation of mechanisms addressing 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

29 January 2025