



2025 End-of-Year Management Letter on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse 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 (SEA) 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 the staff rules, regulations and administrative issuances that are applicable to UN Women and its personnel;
- iii) appointed protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) focal points in 100% of country offices and has been proactive in conducting awareness raising activities for its staff members and related personnel, regarding the prohibition of SEA and ways of reporting such acts. This year 84% of its staff members² have completed induction or refresher training on 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, National Officers, United Nations Volunteers, affiliated personnel and contingent members.

- 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 SEA.

In addition, UN Women has reinforced its efforts to manage risks of SEA when establishing funded partnerships.

UN Women ensured that its implementing 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, conducted appropriate risk assessments for each of its operations and programmes and has acted upon the results and continues to review these on an ongoing basis.

UN Women is committed to zero tolerance to SEA, 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 SEA

Throughout 2025, UN Women's in-country PSEA focal points have provided ongoing support to implementing partners through targeted training and awareness-raising activities, in close collaboration with the respective programme managers, helping them understand and fulfil their PSEA obligations throughout all stages of programming.

UN Women aims to promulgate the revised Selection of Programme Partners Procedure in early 2026, aligning the PSEA assessment with the Inter-agency Common Assessment Tool available on the UN Partner Portal for Programme Partners. As part of this revision, UN Women will allow women-led and women's rights organizations to use a simplified PSEA capacity assessment (while meeting the requirements of the UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners), to support those organizations with limited capacity.

³ Implementing partner: an entity to which a United Nations office or entity has entrusted the implementation of a programme and/or project specified in a signed document, along with the assumption of responsibility and accountability for the effective use of resources and the delivery of outputs. Implementing partners may include – but are not limited to – government institutions, inter-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations, including NGOs. Implementing partners' subcontractors are subsumed within this definition (United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners, 2018).

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.

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.

Under a hybrid model of investigation services, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), complemented by UN Women’s Internal Investigation Function (IIF) of the Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS), are entrusted with the responsibility of providing investigation services, including on SEA, to UN Women. Both the OIOS and the IIF ensure a sensitive and respectful investigative process, which includes clear communication of procedures to victims/survivors, trauma-informed interviews, and regular progress updates, employing a victim/survivor-centred approach.

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). While these established protocols remain in place, UN Women is also mindful that access to victim assistance through Gender-Based Violence (GBV) pathways may become more challenging in 2026 due to funding reductions impacting women-led organizations more broadly.⁴

To bolster existing capacity, PSEA Focal Points are continuously trained in the victim/survivor-centred approach, ensuring they are well equipped to deliver sensitive, compassionate, and effective support at the country level. A Community of Practice (CoP) for all PSEA Focal Points provides a space for sharing good practices and key resources related to this approach.

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. Related data continues to be collected against the dedicated set of indicators in the aforementioned harmonized reporting template.

⁴ [“At a breaking point: The impact of foreign aid cuts on women’s organizations in humanitarian crises worldwide.”](#) (April 2025)

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
19 February 2026