

**UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS EXECUTIVE BOARD
ANNUAL SESSION 2021**

**BACKGROUND NOTE ON RESPONSE
TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA) AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT (SH)**

I. Update by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

In February 2021, UNDP provided the Executive Board with a comprehensive update on the progress and results achieved as part of the implementation of its first Strategy and Action Plan (2019-2020) to address concerns related to Sexual Harassment (SH) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). UNDP's updated Strategy for 2021-2022 was approved by the Administrator and the UNDP Executive Group in March 2021. It builds on actions taken to date and aims to continue to further advance progress across the Organization.

Progress to date

2. While the updated Strategy recognizes that there is still more to do, the overall situation across UNDP has improved. After over two years of work to prevent and effectively address instances of SH and SEA and to build an inclusive working environment free from any kind of harassment, there is now a much higher level of awareness and understanding of relevant issues among UNDP personnel. As part of the Country Office survey conducted in July 2020 – in which 98 Country Offices participated - 98% of respondents said their leadership was actively engaged in preventing and tackling SH and SEA and 93% said they were well informed about the issues and knew what to do to prevent and respond to these harmful behaviours. There are good policies, systems and processes in place which are aligned to international standards and UN-wide guidance. UNDP is collaborating closely with our sister agencies to maximize the coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of its response. Our Country Office survey confirmed that 96% of the (Prevention of SEA) PSEA focal points participated in various interagency networks and about 50% said that non-UN organizations were also part of joint work. During the three years before the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers of SH and SEA reports rose from 6-7 annually up to 2017 to over 30 in 2018 and in 2019. In 2020, the number of reports dropped to 13. In 2021, UNDP's Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI) received 10 reports as of 15 April 2021, which is commensurate with the numbers of reports received at this time in 2018 (9 reports) and 2019 (12 reports).

3. This progress confirms the effectiveness of the approaches implemented thus far. Therefore the 2021-2022 Strategy will continue focusing on the same four priority areas of: prevention, reporting and response, support to victims/survivors, and accountability in order to continue to drive forward change in our organizational culture and to firmly put the victim/survivor at the center of our prevention and response actions.

Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2022

4. The objectives of the 2021-2022 Strategy are:

- to significantly reduce the incidence of SH and SEA committed by UNDP personnel
- to ensure that each case is identified and addressed quickly and effectively with a focus on the well-being and protection of the victims/survivors and strict accountability for perpetrators while maintaining due process
- to ensure that proper safeguards are embedded into all UNDP operations, including programme activities implemented both by UNDP and through our Implementing Partners

- to minimize SH and SEA risks and ensure appropriate response action.

5. To achieve these objectives, UNDP will continue focusing on outreach, training and communication to further enhance awareness about SH and SEA with UNDP personnel, as well as our beneficiaries and partners. New and innovative ways of raising the profile of the issue might include creating an on-demand podcast series; setting up a pop-up window or banner, which changes every few days when personnel first log onto the Intranet; looking at how men can be positive instruments of change; providing short notes or infographics about personal security including information about shelters and other non-UN support mechanisms in countries; sharing best practices from other industries and holding small group sessions to go over case studies and highlight potential flashpoints. Other areas of focus will include: enhancing the capacity of all managers to effectively prevent and respond to SH and SEA; strengthening advisory and other support to personnel; building SH and SEA safeguards into all aspects of UNDP operations; preventing SH and SEA perpetrators placed in the Clear Check database from joining the organization and holding personnel involved in SH and SEA behaviours accountable; improving the timeliness of investigations and taking prompt disciplinary action, as appropriate; and identifying more resources to support victims and survivors, in close collaboration with local partners and members of the UN system and the international community at large.

6. *With regards to SH*, the aim is to ensure that UNDP's workplace is safe, inclusive, and free from any harassment, and if incidents do occur, they are identified and properly responded to without exception. Some of the specific priorities will include:

- Review the key institutional policies, processes, and mechanisms and strengthen them, as needed, in line with best practices and common UN approaches
- Doing more analysis of our incident cases to better inform our response and approaches
- Make sure all personnel – in particular, managers – have a high level of understanding about the issue, act accordingly, and are accountable
- Continue to campaign to raise awareness, focusing specifically on identifying root causes and tailoring solutions to local conditions; one of the topics to address will be responding to SH in the context of remote teams
- Continue to strengthen safe spaces for personnel to speak up and report (e.g. the Respectful Workplace Facilitators (RWF) programme that is now in its second year, has already trained 48 RWFs in around 25 countries will continue to expand by at least 25 additional countries in 2021)
- Continue to provide support and counselling to SH victims/survivors through a newly engaged team of in-house counsellors
- Provide leadership (as Co-Chair) to the inter-agency workstream on learning and communications.

7. *For SEA*, the key principles of prevention and response will be the same as for SH, but actions will be tailored to local communities and specifics of the situation on the ground. The aim is for local communities to know about the UNDP standards, i.e. that all forms of sexual misconduct are unacceptable, and to be aware of the mechanisms to report, and receive support, if needed. Some of the specific priorities will include:

- Provide capacity building for PSEA focal points in UNDP country offices
- Continue building awareness among UNDP personnel about SEA, related standards, and mechanisms
- Strengthen collaboration with implementing partners to ensure they understand UNDP standards and act, as needed
- Continue to strengthen UNDP risk management processes and mechanisms – primarily in projects and programmes – to ensure SH and SEA issues are properly reflected and addressed
- Together with other UN agencies on the ground, intensify outreach to beneficiaries of UNDP projects and programmes with a view to:

- a. promoting the establishment of/strengthening of local level mechanisms for SEA reporting (i.e. community-based complaints mechanisms), and
 - b. identifying and facilitating access to support services for victims/survivors, working closely with our sister agencies and through UNDP's own action (*information from a UNDP 'deep dive' on victim/survivor support provided in 12 countries will be circulated separately*)
- Explore and leverage innovative partnerships with other entities to maximize the use and effectiveness of the already existing mechanisms and to build on each other's efforts.

8. Of these priorities, the work with our Implementing Partners and beneficiaries through UNDP Country Offices is of particular importance and is prioritized by the Taskforce on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (the Taskforce) established in 2018 under the auspices of the UNDP Administrator. Equally important is collaboration with other UN agencies as victims often identify perpetrators as UN, not necessarily UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS, etc.

9. In conclusion, it is important to reiterate that while the focus of the first Strategy was to ensure UNDP had the right institutional architecture – policies, mechanisms, capacity, learning and communications materials and channels – to ensure effective prevention and response to SH and SEA, the ambition of this second strategy is to achieve the effective and consistent implementation of the different measures on the ground, in each office and in each country, so that those with whom and for whom we work, as well as everyone in the Organization are protected and supported.

II Update by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

10. In 2021, UNFPA continues the implementation of its victim-centered Strategy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH). The core objective this year is to strengthen leadership, coordination and accountability across three priority areas: a) Effective country mechanisms and structures; b) Accountability and capacity of implementing partners; and c) Access to quality information and assistance.

11. To take these priorities forward, the Fund is implementing a number of key initiatives both in its role as Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) Champion on PSEAH and under its regular 2021 PSEAH action plan.

IASC PSEAH Championship Initiatives

12. As IASC Champion, UNFPA is building a roster of trained PSEA experts for deployment to humanitarian and development settings. The appointment of dedicated inter-agency coordinators at the outset of every response has proven to be a critical component to support leadership and ensure accountability on the ground. The selection of candidates is underway and a pool of approximately 25 trained and vetted experts at the P4 and P3 level will be available for short- and longer term deployments in August 2021. To date, 14 IASC high risk operations have requested coordinator support. In immediate response, UNFPA deployed, in April 2021, one full-time coordinator to the Central African Republic. Resource mobilization efforts are ongoing to support also other requests. In the meantime, UNFPA continues to lead PSEA networks in 14 high-risk countries with staff who are double-hatting in this role.

13. In April 2021, UNFPA has commissioned an external review of the IASC approach to PSEAH to assess the effectiveness and impact of the measures implemented over the past years. The review is being carried out by an external expert with the strategic guidance of a senior IASC advisory group. The final report will be submitted to the IASC Principals in October 2021 for consideration of the findings and implementation of recommendations.

14. Other Championship initiatives include the development of a training package for GBV practitioners to meet the particular needs of survivors/victims of SEA with an anticipated roll-out in the fourth quarter of 2021; and an advocacy campaign with a series of 350 PSEAH dialogues in 35 high-risk countries and the goal to reach a critical mass of 350,000 beneficiaries with quality information.

Other Interagency Initiatives

15. UNFPA is actively engaged in other interagency initiatives, including the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Task Force on Sexual Harassment and its work on advancing a common understanding of a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment. A review of the UNFPA harassment policy framework is envisaged for December 2021, upon issuance of new CEB guidance, to ensure alignment with evolving best practices.

16. Lastly, UNFPA participates in the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and is seeking adherence to the DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance. UNFPA is pleased for this opportunity to champion, alongside other adherent members, the implementation of higher standards on ending sexual wrongdoing and wider adherence to DAC recommendations.

Implementing Partner Management

17. UNFPA continues to operationalize the United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners. As of April 2021, UNFPA has assessed 248 (22 per cent) of its non-governmental organization (NGO) partners.

18. UNFPA participates in, and leads joint efforts to harmonize the UN-system approach to implementing partner SEA. To this end, UNFPA launched, in April 2021, an inter-agency pilot project in the Democratic Republic of Congo to coordinate the assessment of shared UN partners. UNFPA also leads inter-agency efforts to integrate PSEA into the United Nations Partner Portal, which will facilitate better coordination of partner assessments, risk management and monitoring.

Prevention

19. UNFPA continues to prioritize prevention with a focus on training and capacity building. Capacity building of UNFPA PSEA focal points is ongoing: In February 2021, 650 programme managers and PSEA focal points received dedicated training on the implementing partner assessment. Virtual induction and refresher training sessions were held for 90 UNFPA focal points in March 2021. In-depth training for selected focal points is in preparation and will be delivered jointly with other UN-agencies in the coming months.

20. Staff and managerial training in 2021 focus on a) strengthening managerial capacities to prevent and respond to workplace conflicts and grievances, including SEAH. Training modules are in preparation and external facilitators will be engaged this quarter to deliver the training over a 12-month period to all UNFPA managers; and b) Dialogues with personnel across the organization to provide greater clarity on roles and responsibilities of the various actors responsible for PSEAH and the overall goal to improve trust in existing accountability mechanisms. Additionally, in 2021, all UNFPA personnel have to undertake the revised version of the mandatory PSEA online training.

Response

21. UNFPA has zero tolerance for any form of sexual wrongdoing and is taking prompt, structured and effective response to every case.

22. As at 30 April 2021, the UNFPA Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS) received three allegations of sexual harassment, a notable decrease compared to five allegations received in the same time period in 2020.

23. As at 30 April 2021, OAIS received nine allegations of SEA, of which five pertain to implementing partner personnel, a significant increase compared to two SEA allegations received by April 2020. Six additional allegations labelled as “SEA” were self-disclosed by implementing partners during, or in the context of the PSEA assessment. UNFPA is reviewing all allegations to assess the adequacy of corrective actions taken by partners and to determine appropriate risk mitigating measures including continuation of partnership engagement.

24. To ensure a coherent UN-system response to cases involving implementing partner SEA, UNFPA is developing jointly with UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF a harmonized approach to guide the management response and mitigating action, including pending investigations. The two first cases of implementing partner SEA will be brought to the newly established UNFPA Implementing Partner Review Committee in May 2021 for determination of adequate contractual action.

25. UNFPA is committed to achieving tangible results in 2021, placing the rights and dignity of victims at the centre of our efforts. We are honored to advance the PSEA agenda across the humanitarian sector during this Championship year and count on your continued support to this joint endeavor,

III Update by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

26. During the beginning of 2021, UNOPS has had the opportunity to assess our achievements from 2020, but also we have identified areas of possible improvement. Despite the numerous and significant challenges faced in 2020, UNOPS was able to continue implementing projects without major disruptions. This has been thanks to our ability to adapt to the extremely difficult circumstances faced globally. Our agility was made possible by that of our personnel, yet that should not be taken for granted.

27. 2020 has highlighted the importance of focusing on well-being. While UNOPS had already taken several initiatives aimed at improving contractual conditions for UNOPS personnel, such as the UNOPS provident fund and long-term sick leave for local individual contractors, UNOPS responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by further strengthening our focus on the well-being of our personnel. This was proven to be the correct approach as many of our colleagues faced a wide range of challenges to well-being requiring UNOPS to have a large catalogue of measures, tools, and practices to address these needs. Remote working, homeschooling, working from different time zones, and facing long periods of isolation away from home or at hardship locations are challenges that require different responses. With COVID-19 impacting our projects, a diverse range of solutions was also required in terms of project delivery.

28. While maintaining all available efforts to overcome the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as we did in 2020, during 2021 UNOPS continues with its normal activities. Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH) remains at the top of the agenda. To do so, UNOPS has had to adapt to new ways of working including moving activities, such as training or fact-finding, to remote and online based environments where possible. The first quarter of 2021 has allowed us to improve our understanding of our most immediate needs to better protect our beneficiaries and personnel against SEAH.

29. Our key priorities for 2021 are:

Leadership and strategic focus:

30. In 2021, this important topic will be engaged with at all leadership levels across the organization. Since 2018, every January, UNOPS Executive Director submits to the Executive Board a Management Letter where she assumes personal accountability regarding UNOPS prevention and response efforts against SEA. As a result of the 2021 Management Letter, senior leaders across the organization made equivalent commitments to those made by the UNOPS Executive Director. Additionally, the UNOPS Executive Director has included in the agenda of the Senior Leadership Team biannual updates about PSEAH where progress is monitored and further direction is provided. These actions result in higher focus and attention to the protection of beneficiaries and personnel against SEAH.

31. Moreover, in addition to regularly updating and monitoring the implementation of the PSEAH action plans at corporate, regional and local levels, UNOPS relies on issuing strategy documents to give direction and focus to our efforts in terms of protection against SEAH. We believe that strategy development and documentation is also an important monitoring tool with additional positive effects in terms of continuous improvement.

32. Toward the end of 2021 or the beginning of 2022, UNOPS will undertake a review of its recently established Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Prevention Strategy. Moreover, we are in the process of issuing brand new communications and learning strategies regarding the protection against SEAH which will fall under the broader Prevention Strategy.

33. Through these leadership activities, we expect to achieve a positive effect on shaping the culture of the organization and achieve long-lasting positive effects in terms of reinforcing protection against SEAH.

Continue strengthening the UNOPS Speak Up Culture:

34. The Executive Director has placed a very strong emphasis on the benefits that UNOPS Speak Up Culture brings to the organization. Senior leaders at all levels have supported and amplified these messages. We are currently developing training to strengthen this aspect of UNOPS Culture. But we know that training is not enough, so UNOPS leaders are acting as role models. For example, as part of the annual UNOPS Awards and Recognition programme, the Executive Director granted a personal award to a member of the personnel of UNOPS for raising awareness through internal communications channels about important topics such as gender equality. This example, among others, helps all personnel to champion the UNOPS Speak Up Culture where areas for improvement are identified.

Regular independent reviews:

35. In 2020, UNOPS Internal Audit and Investigations Group (IAIG) underwent an independent external assessment of its investigative office. The purpose was to provide assurance to its stakeholders that its work was being done in accordance with relevant standards and benchmarks.

36. The report, which has been issued in 2021, found that the investigation function is in conformity with generally accepted standards for investigations in international organizations as reflected in the Uniform Principles and Guidelines for Investigations. It also complied with IAIG's Charter and with other UNOPS Legislative Instruments. As part of this, the assessment concluded that UNOPS is complying with best practices regarding protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. For example, investigations into SEA were completed less than six months after receipt of complaint.

37. In 2021, UNOPS also expects to receive the results of the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessment. The assessment includes protection against Sexual

Exploitation and Abuse within its scope, so in due time we will be sharing with you the relevant findings, our management response, and the subsequent action plan, as we did in the case of the past independent review conducted by Deloitte.

38. Currently, we are undergoing a Gender and Inclusion Participatory Audit which is covering sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse concerns.

39. Finally, during 2021 UNOPS will commission an additional external assessment of our processes for reporting wrongdoing and grievances management. UNOPS is highly committed to continue improving its handling of these matters by ensuring a constant benchmarking to international best practices.

Safeguarding:

40. In 2021, we will complete the development of a package for safeguarding projects against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment occurrences. This includes guidance for project teams, an induction package for project workers (contractor workers and community workers), a template Code of Conduct for individual workers, and awareness-raising materials. At the same time, we have included Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment among the items of the regular Health Safety, Social and Environmental (HSSE) site inspections.

Implementing partners and contractors:

41. In terms of our work with implementing partners, we have established a working group to develop a better understanding of what and how adequate safeguards and appropriate actions are needed to strengthen protections against SEAH by UNOPS implementing partners. This will guide further steps that UNOPS will take in this area.

42. We have finalized a pilot project to determine the needs of our suppliers of goods and services and the learning gained during that exercise will help to inform our work in this area focusing on suppliers going forward but also transferring these lessons learned to implementing partners where applicable.

43. Finally, it is important to recall that UNOPS is a project-based organization, and this impacts the way in which the organization operates. From that point of view, we will be placing an even stronger focus on improving project design in a way that increases awareness and prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment among all individuals present on a project site, so that the risk of these incidents within the site and in surrounding communities is reduced. As per all other aspects of our HSSE work, we believe that engaging and building capacity with our contractors on this topic is a positive contribution. This will have a positive effect for the local communities as well so that the project beneficiaries are fully aware of their rights and how to enforce them.