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Joint Inspection Unit

Review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system organizations” (see [A/80/609](#)).



I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled “Review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system organizations” (see [A/80/609](#)), the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) examines related regulatory and policy frameworks; analyses inter-agency coordination mechanisms; explores practices for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA); evaluates the application of a victim-centred approach; and highlights good practices and identifies lessons learned.

II. General comments

2. Organizations welcome the report, express broad appreciation for the comprehensive and timely nature of the review on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and acknowledge its value in advancing system-wide coherence, accountability and victim/survivor-centred approaches. Many entities underscore the continuing relevance of the issue and confirm that the report aligns with their own institutional priorities and ongoing efforts to strengthen protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

3. Several organizations also welcome the recognition that sexual exploitation and abuse can occur across humanitarian, development and peace contexts and emphasize the importance of ensuring a consistent, system-wide approach that reflects those operational realities.

4. At the same time, organizations acknowledge that, while significant progress has been achieved in recent years, sustained efforts remain critical to consolidate gains and close remaining gaps, particularly in policy frameworks, victim assistance, partner screening, data transparency and accountability. Many entities reaffirm their commitment to ongoing reform initiatives, while noting that full implementation of the recommendations will depend on the availability of adequate financial and human resources, as well as prioritization within existing mandates.

5. In that context, and mindful of the current financial environment, organizations note that resource constraints may affect the timelines for implementing some, if not all, of the proposed recommendations, underscoring the need for a strategic and coordinated approach to ensure realistic, coherent and effective implementation.

6. Due to the complexities of the tasks and recognizing that a number of recommendations require collective or system-wide action, a coordinated approach to addressing the various issues is being undertaken, under the leadership of the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, working in close coordination with the Office of the Victims’ Rights Advocate. The findings of the JIU review were discussed by the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse at its November 2025 meeting, resulting in a request to the Special Coordinator, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, to provide regular status updates at its forthcoming sessions.

7. While the report’s scope is formally defined as focusing on sexual exploitation and abuse, several organizations note that its findings and recommendations also address sexual harassment. Many organizations express support for a holistic, conduct-based approach to addressing all forms of sexual misconduct. Some organizations consider that a more consistent treatment of sexual harassment throughout the review would have strengthened its analytical coherence and underscore the importance of ensuring that existing frameworks and terminology adequately reflect the distinct nature and gravity of different forms of sexual

misconduct, enabling appropriate disciplinary action and a victim-/survivor-centred approach.

8. A number of entities welcome the report's vision of a broader sexual misconduct framework encompassing sexual exploitation and abuse as well as sexual harassment, with a view to strengthening institutional accountability and victim/survivor support. Others encourage the continued tailoring of system-wide guidance to accommodate the diversity of organizational mandates and operational settings.

9. Entities generally support the call by JIU for enhanced coherence across the United Nations system, while drawing attention to the need for the clear delineation of responsibilities, coordination mechanisms and resourcing arrangements. The importance of ensuring alignment with ongoing reviews and updates of key normative instruments – such as the Secretary-General's bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13), subsequently referred to in the present document as “the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin”, and the standards of conduct for the international civil service – is also underscored, to avoid duplication and ensure regulatory consistency.

10. Organizations, referencing the annex of the review in which the actions expected of participating entities are outlined, express support for most of the proposed recommendations, while noting differing views on some, as reflected in the comments below.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

Executive heads of United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2027, review their respective policies, staff regulations and rules, and standards of conduct to ensure that they all include PSEA (protection from sexual exploitation and abuse), are aligned and support disciplinary processes and procedures.

11. Several organizations support the recommendation. Many have already updated or are revising their internal frameworks to strengthen accountability, clarify definitions of misconduct and extend provisions on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse to all personnel and partners.

12. Organizations stress that the successful implementation of the initiatives depends on the timely finalization of two key system-wide instruments: the revised standards of conduct for the international civil service; and the revision to the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin. As both processes are under way, organizations recommend that entity-level revisions follow their completion to ensure coherence across the system.

13. The Secretariat confirms that the revision to the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin, led by the Office of the Special Coordinator, will address gaps, institutionalize a conduct-based approach, incorporate best practices and further operationalize the victim-centred approach.

14. Organizations emphasize that revisions should not only codify standards but also strengthen enforcement, training and awareness measures to ensure effective implementation. They reaffirm their commitment to coordinated, system-wide action and stress that coherence, adequate resourcing and consistent follow-through are essential to sustain progress in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and ensuring respect for victims' rights.

Recommendation 2

Executive heads of United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2027, review sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment policies to more broadly cover sexual misconduct by focusing on the prohibited conduct of personnel, affirming victims' rights, defining "zero tolerance" and incorporating good practices, such as those related to protection against retaliation and the improper use of technology.

15. Most organizations support the recommendation and concur with the importance of establishing a coherent, system-wide approach to addressing all forms of sexual misconduct. Many have undertaken reviews or updates of their internal policies to strengthen provisions on prevention, response and accountability, emphasizing clear definitions of prohibited conduct, a victim/survivor-centred approach, strengthened protection against retaliation and the responsible use of technology.

16. Entities stress that coherence across the United Nations system will depend on the timely completion of the ongoing revisions to the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin and the standards of conduct for the international civil service. They consider that internal reviews should follow those updates to ensure consistency in terminology, standards and implementation, noting it may potentially affect the proposed timeline set out by the Inspectors.

17. While supporting a comprehensive, conduct-based framework and recognizing that sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment can affect anyone, including members of affected communities and personnel in the workplace, some entities note that different forms of misconduct may require distinct processes and tailored legal, administrative and procedural responses. They therefore stress the importance of ensuring that any policy harmonization preserve the specific mechanisms and safeguards applicable to different categories of victims and personnel. Other organizations reaffirm the position that mechanisms for sexual exploitation and abuse should remain distinct from those addressing sexual harassment. Given that position, the Secretariat will support the revision to the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin, while noting that a revision to the Secretary-General's bulletin addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority ([ST/SGB/2019/8](#)), which addresses sexual harassment as a form of prohibited conduct, is not envisaged at present.

18. Organizations also highlight the need to address remaining policy gaps, including those relating to emerging risks, such as technology-facilitated misconduct, and other means of safeguarding against harm. They further underline the importance of clear and practical guidance, adequate training and sustained leadership engagement to ensure that commitments to zero tolerance are translated into effective practice.

19. Overall, organizations share the view that a unified approach ensuring distinct procedures – anchored in coherence, accountability and upholding victims' rights – will best serve to strengthen the United Nations system's collective capacity to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct.

Recommendation 3

At the beginning of 2028, legislative organs and/or governing bodies of United Nations system organizations should request an update from the executive heads of their respective organization with regard to progress made in reviewing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment policies as well as any change management procedures associated with the revisions.

20. Organizations note that the recommendation is addressed to the legislative organs and/or governing bodies.

21. Organizations concur with the intent of the recommendation and affirm the importance of ensuring that legislative organs and governing bodies are kept regularly informed of progress in the review and implementation of policies related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Transparent reporting is viewed as an essential element of accountability, reinforcing the commitment to zero tolerance and maintaining the confidence of Member States and affected populations.

22. Most entities confirm that reporting mechanisms to governing bodies are already in place through existing oversight, ethics and audit frameworks. Many provide periodic updates – often on an annual basis – through established reports to governing or executive boards, oversight committees or equivalent bodies. Those mechanisms generally capture the progress, challenges and lessons learned in implementing policies to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct.

23. Several organizations underline that the objective of the recommendation can best be achieved by integrating such updates within existing reporting cycles, rather than establishing new standalone processes. This would help to avoid duplication, ensure coherence and preserve the efficiency of oversight structures. Entities note that progress in this area is often already reflected in broader corporate or accountability reports, including those on human resources management, ethics or internal oversight.

24. While the recommendation is addressed to their governing bodies rather than the secretariats, entities recognize the value of sustained, transparent dialogue between management and governing bodies. Such engagement is considered vital to maintaining institutional integrity, ensuring consistent follow-up on policy commitments and demonstrating continued system-wide progress in preventing and responding to sexual misconduct.

Recommendation 4

By the end of 2026, executive heads of United Nations system organizations should take individual and/or collective action, in consultation with the executive heads of other CEB organizations, preferably within the framework of existing inter-agency mechanisms, to comprehensively address and coordinate with regard to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (sexual misconduct) and create a new strategy that builds on the approach set out in the Secretary-General's 2017 report (A/71/818 and A/71/818/Corr.1), focusing on prevention, response and integrating a victim-centred approach.

25. There is broad support for developing a renewed, system-wide strategy on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment based on a coherent, coordinated policy framework, including the revision to the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin (in line with paragraphs 13 and 17 above). Entities agree that this should be led by the Secretariat, through the Office of the Special Coordinator, in consultation with CEB and the United Nations Executive Group to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment in the United Nations System.

26. Organizations concur that the strategy should build on the 2017 framework established by the Secretary-General, consolidating efforts to strengthen prevention, accountability, victim/survivor support and coherence across the system. In addition, the Special Coordinator, at the request of the High-level Steering Group, is in the process of updating the system-wide strategy and implementation plan, in close consultation and coordination with relevant organizations of the United Nations system, focusing in 2026 on key areas, including prevention, victim support,

accountability, data and transparency, resourcing (including victim assistance) and coordination. The updated strategy and implementation plan then will be submitted to the Secretary-General for his consideration and approval. Many organizations note that realistic timelines and broad consultations are essential, and some suggest extending the target to 2027.

27. While most support integrating sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment under a single strategy, some caution that their distinct legal and operational dimensions require clear mandates and accountabilities and differentiated response mechanisms that would need to be duly considered while developing such a comprehensive strategy. For the Secretariat, maintaining separate and distinct policies for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment would continue, and each issue would be addressed distinctly. Entities also underscore the need for a victim-centred approach, coordination with the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and attention to emerging risks, such as technology-facilitated abuse. Overall, the strategy should reinforce shared standards while allowing flexibility for entity-specific implementation.

Recommendation 5

By the end of 2026, executive heads of United Nations system organizations should take individual and/or collective action, in consultation with the executive heads of other CEB member organizations, preferably within the framework of existing inter-agency coordination mechanisms, to establish a working group to address the coherence and harmonization of SEA data, including what data are reported and in what context, when allegations should be entered and updated as well as the addition of data fields and functions to improve the analysis, transparency and integrity of SEA data.

28. Organizations support the principle of the recommendation and the objective of enhancing the coherence, harmonization and transparency of data on sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system, noting the recommendation's system-wide scope and the need for coordinated action. Organizations agree that reliable, comparable and comprehensive data are critical to understanding the scope of the problem, tracking progress and strengthening accountability and prevention efforts.

29. Most entities agree that implementation should be coordinated system-wide under the leadership of the Office of the Special Coordinator, in collaboration with CEB and its subsidiary networks. Many encourage leveraging existing coordination mechanisms to promote efficiency, avoid duplication and make effective use of the available resources.

30. Entities highlight the need to strengthen and harmonize the use of the iReport SEA Tracker and improve linkages with related databases, such as ClearCheck. Some have initiated internal measures to improve data quality and reporting, while others emphasize the value of collective solutions and shared tools.

31. Several organizations call for stronger safeguards on data protection, confidentiality and informed consent and for more systematic tracking of victim assistance. A collective victim assistance tracking mechanism, with robust safeguards and sustained follow-up, that incorporates victim feedback, is seen as essential to enhancing transparency and accountability. The development of such a mechanism should be coordinated system-wide under the leadership of the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate.

32. While supporting a coordinated approach, many entities consider the proposed timeline to be ambitious given the complexity of aligning data systems and practices.

A phased implementation, informed by ongoing assessments and updates to the iReport SEA Tracker, is seen as more feasible. Overall, entities concur that harmonized, victim-centred and evidence-based data systems are key to strengthening the United Nations' collective response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Recommendation 6

At its eighty-first session, the General Assembly should request that all allegations of SEA in the United Nations Secretariat entities be recorded in the iReport SEA Tracker and included in the Secretary-General's annual report on special measures for PSEA.

33. Organizations note that the recommendation is addressed to the General Assembly.

Recommendation 7

By the end of 2026, the Secretary-General should commission a report with regard to the feasibility of establishing shared and/or common services to support sustained and regular funding for inter-agency PSEA coordinators in high-risk and priority countries.

34. Organizations note that the recommendation is addressed to the Secretary-General.

35. The Secretariat notes the urgent need for the United Nations to institutionalize protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and secure long-term, predictable funding, considering, however, that the entire United Nations system is functioning in a challenging fiscal environment where resource availability to support such efforts is not guaranteed. It is agreed to take the recommendation forwards and to commission the proposed feasibility report in 2026. A 2024 independent assessment commissioned by Office of the Special Coordinator confirmed that the lack of sustained resources undermines the United Nations' ability to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and recommended exploring funding models, including cost-sharing approaches, to support system-wide efforts for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

36. Some recognize the key role of the inter-agency coordinators on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in support of resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators and United Nations country teams/humanitarian country teams, as well as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee PSEACap funding mechanism and roster of coordinators on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Recommendation 8

At the beginning of 2026, executive heads of United Nations system organizations should take individual and/or collective action, in consultation with the executive heads of other CEB organizations, preferably within the framework of inter-agency mechanisms, to agree on system-wide coherence and harmonization of ClearCheck procedures, including with respect to entering subjects, name removal procedures, screening of candidates for affiliate personnel categories as well as the potential expansion of its use to include other types of misconduct.

37. Organizations support the principle of the recommendation but see its implementation as requiring collective, system-wide coordination led by the Office of the Special Coordinator and CEB-related machinery, to ensure consistency and avoid duplication.

38. Many entities recognize the relevance of the proposed measures for safe recruitment and accountability, while underscoring the need for flexibility to reflect differing legal frameworks, internal procedures and resource capacities.

39. ClearCheck is already in use across the system and has been expanded to cover all forms of misconduct, but entities note the need for a more consistent approach in its application, as well as for its expansion to cover all categories of personnel and for its closer integration with other mechanisms, such as the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme and Project Soteria of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). Effective participation, consistent recording and harmonized processes are considered essential to strengthening accountability and maximizing the system-wide value of the tool. Several entities caution that the original timeline is ambitious and recommend phased or extended deadlines to account for inter-agency coordination, resource limitations and technical updates, including the roll-out of ClearCheck 2.0.

Recommendation 9

Executive heads of United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2026, conduct an assessment of the mechanisms used for screening and vetting of personnel for substantiated sexual misconduct allegations, including identifying types of personnel to be screened and determining gaps as well as risks in not implementing the most comprehensive vetting and screening procedures.

40. Most entities agree on the importance of comprehensive, system-wide screening and welcome efforts to enhance safeguards to prevent the re-hiring of offenders. However, several entities point to the need for flexibility in timelines, adequate resources and realistic implementation targets given varying capacities across organizations.

41. Entities generally endorse the continued use and expansion of specific screening tools such as ClearCheck, the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme and Project Soteria as complementary tools to ensure safe recruitment and strengthen the screening of applicants from outside the United Nations system. Many stress that any assessment of those mechanisms should be coordinated at the system level to ensure consistency, avoid duplication and draw on shared benchmarks and guidance. Some caution that the feasibility of conducting such assessments may be limited for those organizations that do not yet use all of the mechanisms, underscoring the need for common standards and technical support.

42. There is broad recognition that comprehensive vetting requires sustained investment in human and financial resources and that flexibility should be allowed for entities to set implementation timelines based on institutional contexts. A phased, coordinated approach is viewed as essential to ensuring the coherence, comparability and credibility of system-wide efforts to prevent the re-hiring of individuals with a record of sexual misconduct.

Recommendation 10

By the end of 2026, executive heads of United Nations system organizations who have not yet done so should incorporate SEA into their enterprise risk management processes to identify and mitigate risks of SEA at different operational levels, including risks associated with implementing partners and vendors, to inform their PSEA action plans.

43. Organizations support the integration of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse into enterprise risk management frameworks and processes. Some organizations already have mature systems for partner risk management, including

specific indicators and assurance measures relating to sexual exploitation and abuse. Many indicate that such integration is already under way, with protection from sexual exploitation and abuse reflected in corporate risk registers and risk treatment plans, including institutional safeguards, and due diligence mechanisms for implementing partners and vendors. Several entities highlight that such efforts are part of broader initiatives to strengthen accountability, oversight and risk management.

44. Several organizations emphasize the importance of ensuring coherence across the system and call for guidance to harmonize approaches, particularly in relation to partners and commercial vendors, as well as government stakeholders. Some also note that expanding due diligence to external entities will have resource implications that need to be considered collectively. Others underline that implementation should remain flexible to reflect different operational contexts and levels of maturity in risk management systems.

45. One organization, however, considers the current level of sexual exploitation and abuse-related risk within its operations to be low and therefore does not deem it necessary to include sexual exploitation and abuse in its risk register at this stage. It notes that existing safeguards already address related risks, while expressing openness to revisiting the issue should a common system-wide decision be taken.

Recommendation 11

By the end of 2026, executive heads of United Nations system organizations should assess: (a) the use of administrative leave without pay; (b) the criteria for imposing disciplinary measures in sexual misconduct cases; (c) the timeline from completion of an investigation to the imposition of disciplinary measures; and (d) the procedures in place for informing victims of measures taken.

46. Support for the recommendation is partial. While many organizations endorse the proposed internal assessment of disciplinary and administrative practices related to sexual misconduct, several underline structural, legal and resource constraints that limit their ability to implement the measures in full. Entities generally agree on the importance of consistency and transparency across the United Nations system in the application of administrative leave without pay, disciplinary criteria, timelines for disciplinary measures and information for victims. Many indicate that relevant procedures are already in place or are being strengthened and that further harmonization would enhance coherence and accountability, including through standardized guidance.

47. A number of organizations stress that disciplinary action must be determined on a case-by-case basis, ensuring due process and alignment with applicable staff rules and tribunal jurisprudence. Some also note that implementation may depend on the availability of dedicated resources and realistic timelines. Others highlight that, within existing United Nations administrative arrangements, authority for certain investigative or disciplinary actions remains limited, impacting the ability of some entities to control timelines or directly communicate with victims. Those organizations encourage continued coordination and system-wide guidance to facilitate more effective follow-up and victim engagement.

48. The Secretariat, in turn, underscores that the recommendation should be strengthened and emphasizes the importance of moving from assessment to action, consistently applying disciplinary measures and upholding victims' rights to information, justice and accountability throughout the process.

Recommendation 12

By the end of 2028, executive heads of United Nations system organizations should take collective action, in consultation with the executive heads of other members of the CEB, preferably within the framework of inter-agency mechanisms, to explore the establishment of an inter-agency pooled funding mechanism to assist victims of SEA.

49. While many organizations endorse the idea of a predictable pooled funding mechanism to ensure expectable and coordinated assistance to victims and to children born of sexual exploitation and abuse, others call for further clarity on its governance, scope and funding arrangements before committing to implementation.

50. Acknowledging the gaps in holistic assistance, services and support for victims/survivors, some note that such collective action should aim at reinforcing existing gender-based violence and child protection services at the country level and should not be duplicative.

51. Several organizations underline the need for clear leadership, equitable burden-sharing and sustainable financing, noting that any mechanism should reflect the varied risk profiles and operational realities across entities. Some express doubts about the feasibility and added value of such a mechanism compared with existing structures.

52. Most recently, at the request of the High-level Steering Group, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate was tasked with developing – in collaboration with United Nations offices, entities and implementing partners – a proposal for a predictably financed United Nations system-wide mechanism to provide harmonized support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and children born of sexual exploitation and abuse, for review by the Steering Group. It is recognized that such a mechanism will need to be developed in close cooperation with, and aligned to, the financing arrangements proposed in response to recommendation 7 above.

53. There is broad consensus on the need to strengthen coherence, sustainability and victim-centred support across the United Nations system, building on lessons learned from past models to ensure effective, consistent and rights-based assistance.

Recommendation 13

By the end of 2026, legislative organs and/or governing bodies should request that executive heads of United Nations system organizations produce an annual report on all disciplinary measures taken against their respective personnel for sexual misconduct, including the nature of the misconduct, whether subjects were added to the ClearCheck database of sexual misconduct records, any assistance provided to victims and the number of all relevant criminal referrals made to the competent national authorities.

54. Organizations note that the recommendation is addressed to the legislative organs or governing bodies.

55. There is support for the principle of enhanced transparency and accountability in reporting disciplinary measures, including use of the ClearCheck database, assistance provided to victims and relevant criminal referrals. It is suggested that the timeline for reporting could be aligned with recommendation 2 above, ensuring consistency with the review and update of policies relating to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and the broader incorporation of victims' rights and good practices.

56. Overall, there is general agreement that harmonized, transparent reporting would strengthen accountability, support victims' rights and provide governing bodies with a clearer view of disciplinary practices across the United Nations system. Many entities already produce annual reports covering disciplinary actions for some categories of personnel, with some including information on sexual misconduct, placements in ClearCheck and criminal referrals. Several organizations indicate that reporting on assistance provided to victims may be limited due to operational or security considerations, and some note that timelines should align with broader policy reviews to ensure consistency across the system.

Recommendation 14

At its eighty-first session, the General Assembly should establish a mechanism to address the processes and procedures for adjudicating paternity and related support claims as a result of SEA involving personnel in peace operations, including the roles and responsibilities of the United Nations Secretariat, Member States and relevant parties when claims are made.

57. Organizations note the recommendation is addressed to the General Assembly.

58. While many entities consider the recommendation to be applicable to their organization, others support it in principle. Supportive entities emphasize the importance of extending processes to cover all paternity cases involving United Nations civilian personnel, including beyond peacekeeping missions, and of integrating relevant guidance into broader transition frameworks on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, while ensuring a victim-centred approach. They also stress that children born of sexual exploitation and abuse should receive interim assistance, regardless of context.

Recommendation 15

At its eighty-second session, the General Assembly should consider endorsement of a new system-wide approach and strategy for addressing sexual misconduct that ensures a victim-centred approach, mobilizes inter-agency capabilities and capitalizes on available resources.

59. Organizations note the recommendation is addressed to the General Assembly.
