



**United Nations**

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

**Report of the Joint Inspection Unit**

**Prepared by Eileen A. Cronin and Conrod Hunte**





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United Nations • New York, 2025

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## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Abbreviations and acronyms . . . . .	v
I. Introduction . . . . .	1
A. Context . . . . .	1
B. About the report . . . . .	3
II. Analysis of policies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and related frameworks in Joint Inspection Unit participating organizations . . . . .	4
A. Policies in Joint Inspection Unit participating organizations . . . . .	4
B. Gaps in policies . . . . .	5
C. A path forward: establishing a comprehensive sexual misconduct policy . . . . .	7
III. Inter-agency coordination for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse . . . . .	8
A. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms . . . . .	8
B. System-wide data collection and reporting on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse . . . . .	9
C. Access to sexual exploitation and abuse data and transparency with respect to allegations . . . . .	10
IV. Implementing strategies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the commitment of leadership . . . . .	11
A. Accountability and capacities at the organizational level . . . . .	11
B. Accountability and capacities in the field . . . . .	11
V. Addressing the conduct of United Nations system personnel through training, outreach and change management . . . . .	12
A. Training and awareness-raising with respect to policies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for United Nations personnel . . . . .	12
B. Beyond mandatory training: innovative prevention strategies addressing the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse . . . . .	14
VI. Safe recruitment practices: screening and vetting personnel for sexual misconduct . . . . .	14
A. ClearCheck: the system-wide screening database on sexual misconduct . . . . .	15
B. Beyond ClearCheck . . . . .	16
VII. Assessments of risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and mitigation measures . . . . .	17
A. Risk assessments at the organizational level . . . . .	17
B. Risk assessments in the field . . . . .	17
C. Screening and vetting processes for implementing partners and commercial vendors . . . . .	17
VIII. Responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse . . . . .	19
A. Mechanisms for reporting and handling complaints at participating organizations . . . . .	19
B. Investigating allegations . . . . .	19

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C.	Administrative and disciplinary measures for substantiated allegations . . . . .	20
D.	Assistance to victims . . . . .	21
IX.	Engagement with governing bodies and Member States on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse . . . . .	22
A.	Coverage of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by governing and legislative bodies . . . . .	22
B.	Criminal referrals to national authorities . . . . .	22
C.	Member States: United Nations peacekeeping and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse . . . . .	23
D.	Member States: supporting a new approach to protection against sexual exploitation and abuse . . . . .	24
Annex		
	Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit . . . . .	25

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

CEB	United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICSC	International Civil Service Commission
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
PSEA	Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN Tourism	World Tourism Organization
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WFP	World Food Programme

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WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization



## I. Introduction

1. A review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in the United Nations system organizations was included in the 2024 programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). The review represents the first independent and comprehensive system-wide review of the topic and covers all 28 JIU participating organizations.
2. The objectives of the review were fivefold: (a) to examine related regulatory and policy frameworks; (b) to analyse inter-agency coordination mechanisms; (c) to explore practices for preventing and responding to SEA; (d) to evaluate the application of a victim-centred approach; and (e) to highlight good practices and identify lessons learned.
3. The review employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative data-collection methods, including: a desk review of relevant documents including relevant administrative tribunal cases; a corporate questionnaire; 163 formal interviews with 311 officials and external stakeholders; and case studies conducted in 14 United Nations operations.
4. A draft of the present report underwent an internal peer review for quality assurance and was subsequently shared with JIU participating organizations. The Inspectors affirm that independence, impartiality and professional integrity were maintained throughout the planning, execution and drafting stages.
5. Two JIU outputs were produced: (a) the present report, focusing on the main findings, conclusions and recommendations and available in the six official languages of the United Nations; and (b) an expanded report, issued under the symbol JIU/REP/2025/2 [Expanded report], providing a broader analysis, detailed findings and related supporting information including annexes.

### A. Context

6. SEA arises from power imbalances and gender inequality, wherein perpetrators exploit their authority for sexual gain. These dynamics are often exacerbated by additional factors such as racism, impunity (real or perceived) and social norms that tolerate or normalize sexual misconduct. Given the prevalence of such conditions across United Nations operational settings, SEA remains a risk that can, and has, occurred in all contexts.

#### 1. Key frameworks for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

7. The foundational policy guiding protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) in the United Nations Secretariat and its funds and programmes is 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 report as "the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin". This bulletin applies to all personnel.
8. Other key documents influencing PSEA policies include:
  - The 2017 Secretary-General's report, entitled "Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: a new approach" ([A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)), which introduced a strategic shift towards a victim-centred approach, SEA prevention protocols, civil society engagement and increased transparency

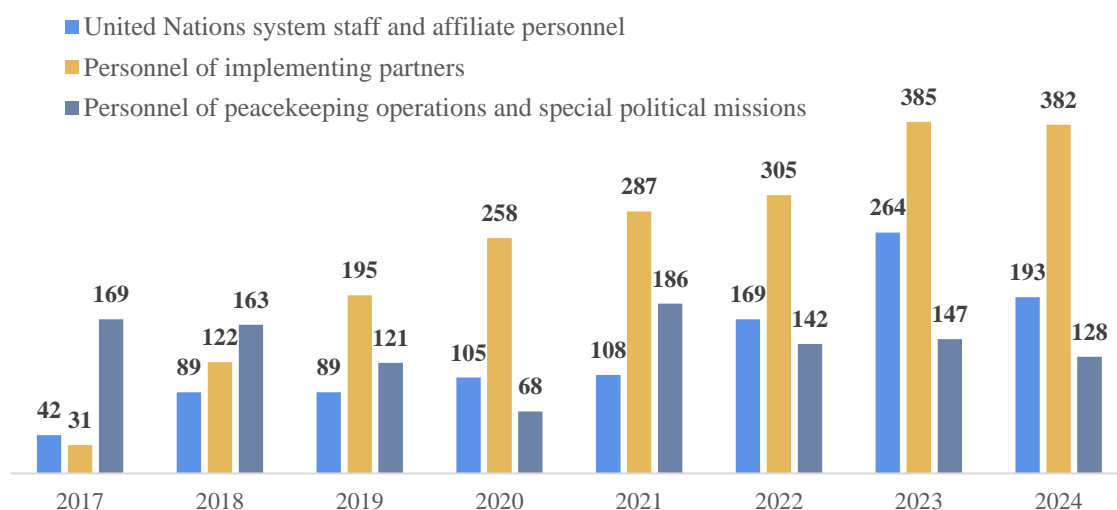
- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (2003, revised in 2019), which guide SEA prevention and response in humanitarian contexts
- The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service (2013), which establish ethical expectations for United Nations personnel, including regarding personal conduct
- The United Nations victims' rights statement (2023), entitled "Your rights as a victim of sexual exploitation or abuse committed by United Nations staff or related personnel", which outlines a victim-centred response and affirms the rights of victims to respectful treatment, support, justice, participation, protection, confidentiality, remedy and complaint mechanisms

## 2. Extent of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations personnel and personnel of implementing partners (2017–2024)

9. From 2017 to 2024, the United Nations publicly reported SEA allegations involving 4,148 individuals who were employed as staff and related personnel within JIU participating organizations, including 1,059 United Nations system staff and affiliate personnel (26 per cent), 1,965 personnel of implementing partners (47 per cent) and 1,124 civilian and uniformed personnel in peacekeeping operations and special political missions (27 per cent). These individuals were almost exclusively male. Reported figures likely underestimate the true scale of SEA due to persistent underreporting, though in some contexts the allegations may reflect greater trust in reporting mechanisms. See figure I for the breakdown by year.

Figure I

**Number of personnel involved in sexual exploitation and abuse allegations, by personnel type, reported by Joint Inspection Unit participating organizations, 2017–2024**



Source: iReport SEA Tracker and "Conduct in UN field missions" database, both accessed 13 March 2025.

10. Approximately 43 per cent of allegations were related to sexual exploitation, 25 per cent to sexual abuse and the remainder were classified as relating to both sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, or were unclear. About 4 per cent of allegations against United Nations staff and affiliate personnel occurred at headquarters locations.

11. Between 2017 and 2024, 3,129 individuals were investigated as a result of SEA allegations. Of these, 34 per cent were found to have committed SEA, 24 per cent were either subjects of unsubstantiated allegations or were involved in incidents not classified as SEA; and for 42 per cent, the investigation was closed owing to insufficient information or for other reasons. Many other cases remain pending. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the outcomes of completed investigations by personnel category.

Table 1

**Outcomes of sexual exploitation and abuse investigations, by personnel category, 2017–2024**

<i>Outcome of investigation</i>	<i>United Nations system staff and affiliate personnel</i>	<i>Personnel of implementing partners</i>	<i>Personnel of peace operations</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>
Allegation substantiated	107	636	336	1 079	34
Allegation unsubstantiated or incident determined not to be SEA	279	446	25	750	24
Insufficient information, no participation from victims or no jurisdiction	375	579	234	1 188	38
Subject was dismissed, resigned or separated during process	31	81	–	112	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>1 742</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>3 129</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: iReport SEA Tracker and “Conduct in UN field missions” database, both accessed 13 March 2025.

12. Not all individuals with substantiated SEA allegations were dismissed or separated from service. Approximately two-thirds of such individuals who were staff of the United Nations and affiliates were dismissed or separated from service, while in other cases the subjects resigned or received lesser sanctions. Most implementing partner personnel with substantiated allegations were dismissed. In peace operations, disciplinary outcomes varied: many civilian personnel were dismissed or resigned, and many uniformed personnel were repatriated, with Member States also imposing a range of sanctions including imprisonment, dismissal and demotion.

13. During this period, SEA allegations affected 4,061 victims, 26 per cent of whom were children. Substantiated cases involved approximately 1,177 victims and resulted in 342 paternity claims. Of the 108 claims involving United Nations staff, affiliates and implementing partners, 13 were confirmed. With respect to peacekeeping personnel, although comparable data for the period 2017–2024 are not available, since data-collection began, 759 paternity claims have been reported, of which 70 per cent have not yet been resolved, and only 29 claims have been confirmed.

## **B. About the report**

14. The findings of the review underscore the fact that SEA remains an inherent risk to all United Nations entities, regardless of operational context. Although notable progress has been made in establishing institutional policies and frameworks to prevent and respond to SEA, significant gaps remain. Many entities lack coherent and aligned regulatory frameworks, undermining efforts towards accountability and the protection of victims’ rights throughout the process. Furthermore, inconsistencies in defining what constitutes SEA and who qualifies as a victim further divert attention from the core issue: personnel misconduct and abuse of authority for sexual gain.

15. While efforts to build personnel capacity and raise awareness have advanced, deeper changes in the organizational culture remain essential. However, only a few entities have meaningfully embarked on this path. Given that the United Nations serves some of the world's most vulnerable populations, ensuring that its personnel are of the highest integrity is fundamental to protecting these populations. Nevertheless, weaknesses in candidate screening persist. Moreover, serious gaps remain in the engagement and capacity building of implementing partners and vendors in preventing and responding to SEA. The review also identified delays in investigation and disciplinary processes, which risk diminishing trust in institutional mechanisms and undermining the protection of victims' rights. Finally, the Inspectors stress the vital role that governing and/or legislative bodies and Member States must play in driving accountability and systemic improvement. The Inspectors note that the findings of the review are a call to action for JIU participating organizations at a time of deep budgetary crisis across the United Nations system. Cuts to human and programmatic resources risk exacerbating SEA and must be carefully weighed when making resourcing decisions.

16. Fifteen formal recommendations, which will be tracked and reported on by JIU, have been issued as a result of the review. The annex to the present report provides a table indicating each recommendation and the corresponding required action. The review also resulted in 33 informal recommendations, shown in bold, which complement or inform the formal recommendations.

## **II. Analysis of policies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and related frameworks in Joint Inspection Unit participating organizations**

17. This section examines how JIU participating organizations have established regulatory and legal frameworks governing personnel misconduct related to SEA. It highlights enforcement challenges and policy gaps, underscoring the importance of a robust policy foundation to ensure accountability for SEA-related misconduct.

### **A. Policies in Joint Inspection Unit participating organizations**

18. As underscored by the General Assembly in its resolution [57/306](#), an organization's policies, staff regulations and rules, and standards of conduct in relation to PSEA are crucial to establishing clear expectations for the behaviour of personnel. Collectively, these documents serve as an accountability mechanism, enabling an organization to hold perpetrators accountable through the disciplinary process. Of the 28 JIU participating organizations, only five – the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – comprehensively and coherently cover PSEA in their policies, staff regulations and rules, and standards of conduct. Conversely, five specialized agencies – the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) – do not have a PSEA policy. Eighteen JIU participating organizations include references to SEA in their staff regulations and rules, while 10 do not.

19. The ICSC Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, adopted by 18 JIU participating organizations, do not explicitly mention PSEA; hence, their own standards of conduct do not address it. Of the 10 organizations that established their own standards of conduct, 6 did not include PSEA.

20. Ensuring comprehensive coverage of PSEA across policies, staff regulations and rules, and standards of conduct is vital for clearly defining misconduct and supporting a multipronged accountability structure. The following recommendation is intended to ensure PSEA is comprehensively covered in the accountability frameworks of participating organizations.

#### **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, are aligned and support disciplinary processes and procedures.**

21. Victims and witnesses of SEA face significant risks of retaliation. However, most organizations' protection against retaliation policies do not cover protection of external persons. Ethics offices generally lack mandates to safeguard external parties, though some internal investigators implement protective practices. Eleven organizations reference their policies on protection against retaliation in their PSEA policies, which serves to remind staff that retaliation is also misconduct and subject to disciplinary measures; this approach is considered a good practice. **The Inspectors encourage executive heads to reference their organization's policy on protection against retaliation in the respective PSEA policy to protect relevant witnesses and victims from retaliation.**

22. Most PSEA policies have yet to address SEA risks associated with interactive technologies, such as social media, including the distribution of child sexual abuse materials and other illicit content. Only the PSEA policies of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) (which covers the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)) acknowledge these risks. **The Inspectors suggest that organizations address SEA risks associated with emerging technologies in the next revisions of their PSEA policies.**

## **B. Gaps in policies**

23. Unclear language and inconsistent use of terms across PSEA policies weakens accountability efforts and complicates enforcement. One key area of divergence across policies concerns sexual relations with beneficiaries. Eight organizations explicitly state that sexual relations with beneficiaries that involve improper use of rank or position are "prohibited", which is the term used in the IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. In contrast, many others use the softer language of the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin, which states that any relations with beneficiaries of assistance are "strongly discouraged". Navigating this policy area can be challenging in certain organizational contexts, particularly when national personnel come from the same communities they serve and may already be in bona fide relationships with community members, which can also include beneficiaries of assistance. **With regard to sexual relations with beneficiaries, the Inspectors recommend that participating organizations frame their policy language around the conduct of personnel and the improper use of rank or position, while avoiding ambiguous or equivocal language that may hinder consistent interpretation or application across United Nations operating contexts.**

24. Underage marriage remains permitted under certain circumstances in several organizations. The 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin includes an exception for marriage with individuals under the age of 18 if it is legally permitted by their country of citizenship. In 2024, the General Assembly, in its resolution [79/158](#), recognized the harm caused by underage marriage. Although most organizations have moved away from this exception, others still permit it or have internal inconsistencies which cause a misalignment in their regulatory frameworks. **The Inspectors strongly request the organizations still permitting an exception to underage marriage for their personnel to eliminate this exception in relevant policy documents.**

25. Despite definitions currently in place, the practical interpretation of the term sexual exploitation varies widely, particularly with regard to issues like consent, undue advantage and power dynamics. These inconsistencies – reflected even in the decisions of administrative tribunals of participating organizations – highlight the need to focus PSEA policies on the conduct of personnel, devoting particular attention to abuse of power for sexual gain, the context in which the behaviour occurs and the power differential with regard to the affected individual.

26. Solicitation of transactional sex, including from sex workers, is considered sexual exploitation in both the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin and the IASC Six Core Principles. However, this is not clearly articulated in several PSEA policies. **The Inspectors suggest that PSEA policies should clearly state that solicitation of transactional sex, including from sex workers, is not tolerated in United Nations system organizations, underlining that clarity may be necessary for organizations that operate where solicitation of sex workers is legal.**

27. The term “zero tolerance” is widely used in PSEA policies and/or outreach activities but is often ill defined and misunderstood. Misinterpretation of the term, such as equating it with zero cases or assuming that substantiated cases will result in automatic dismissal, can discourage reporting or create false expectations. Use of the phrase “zero tolerance for inaction” without further explanation can also appear to emphasize the processes associated with handling sexual misconduct allegations rather than the outcomes of substantiated allegations. **The Inspectors request that, to set consistent, realistic and clear expectations regarding the organizational stance and commitment to addressing sexual misconduct, participating organizations either fully define “zero tolerance” or use more accessible language in their PSEA policies and outreach and training materials as well as in their disciplinary procedures related to SEA.**

28. An overly narrow definition of what constitutes a victim of SEA can cause further harm as it may restrict the interpretation of SEA to incidents outside workplace settings or to incidents involving individuals defined solely as beneficiaries, possibly excluding other forms of SEA. This is especially problematic where policies with regard to PSEA and sexual harassment overlap, potentially diminishing victims' experiences and affecting disciplinary outcomes. **PSEA policy should focus on the prohibited conduct, rather than on the status of the victim and/or setting of the misconduct.**

29. A victim-centred approach has not yet been mainstreamed in PSEA policies. Only eight organizations have incorporated such an approach or related provisions, and only UNHCR has a stand-alone policy. **The Inspectors encourage organizations to incorporate a victim-centred approach in their PSEA policies and internal oversight charters and to develop corresponding standard operating procedures.**

### C. A path forward: establishing a comprehensive sexual misconduct policy

30. Many PSEA policies across JIU participating organizations are marked by gaps, including ambiguous language, outdated provisions and limited coverage of emerging challenges. Inconsistent definitions of what constitutes a victim and fragmented policy structures, such as separate policies for SEA and sexual harassment, can also lead to inconsistent responses and gaps in protection, particularly when incidents fall between the two definitions (for example, sexual misconduct against community members and against personnel of vendors and implementing partners). This fragmented approach shifts the focus from the conduct of personnel to the identity of the victim, undermining accountability efforts and deterring reporting. It also complicates training, reporting and disciplinary processes, weakening an organization's ability to uphold a clear, consistent standard.

31. Crucially, over a third of participating organizations use the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin as their PSEA policy and the bulletin is widely referenced both inside and outside the United Nations system. Its revision could serve as an important lever for a new approach. **Given its system-wide influence and external reach, the Secretary-General should consider the findings of the present review when revising the 2003 bulletin.**

32. Some organizations, such as UNHCR and WHO (also applicable to UNAIDS), have introduced consolidated sexual misconduct policies that cover sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and sexual harassment in a single policy and emphasize prohibited actions for personnel. UNICEF takes a similar approach in its overarching safeguarding policy, which is designed to address any harm that may arise from its operations or personnel. These comprehensive approaches offer greater clarity to personnel and serve as a more effective tool for driving change in organizational culture.

33. The Inspectors are putting forward a recommendation on policy-level coverage of sexual misconduct with full awareness that the procedures for handling sexual harassment and SEA during the reporting, allegation intake, investigation and disciplinary stages will likely vary. This approach is intended to focus on the conduct of personnel, in order to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment against any individual. It is not intended to conflate the two types of misconduct, as both include a spectrum of behaviours, from unwelcome sexually suggestive comments to criminal conduct, such as sexual assault and rape.

34. All organizations are encouraged to consider adopting a single, integrated sexual misconduct policy focused on personnel behaviour rather than on the context in which the misconduct occurred and/or the status of the victim. As governing bodies have shown interest in PSEA, and most require reporting on it, the following recommendations are intended to enhance accountability in JIU participating organizations.

#### **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.**

**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.**

### **III. Inter-agency coordination for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse**

35. Harmonizing PSEA policies across the United Nations system promotes consistent standards, strengthens accountability efforts and ensures clarity regarding the expectations of all personnel and stakeholders. This section examines mechanisms that support system-wide coordination and knowledge-sharing.

#### **A. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms**

36. Three principal inter-agency coordination mechanisms and functions address PSEA in the United Nations system: the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (hereafter referred to as the Special Coordinator), the Victims' Rights Advocate and the IASC, the United Nations humanitarian coordination forum, which addresses PSEA in humanitarian contexts. The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) also contributes through its collaboration with these mechanisms on various activities related to sexual harassment.

37. Despite a system-wide mandate, the Special Coordinator is widely perceived as the lead for PSEA within the United Nations Secretariat and some of its entities. This misconception, prevalent at both the headquarters and field levels, highlights the fact that the Secretariat and several entities have not yet designated this critical role within their own structures. As a result, this system-wide function is mistakenly treated as having organization-specific responsibilities, undermining clarity, accountability and effective implementation. **The Inspectors advise the United Nations Secretariat to clarify the roles and responsibilities with respect to PSEA within the organization, giving strong consideration to the fact that the Special Coordinator has a system-wide mandate.**

38. A similar pattern is evident in the case of the Victims' Rights Advocate, who is mistakenly considered by the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as the designated person responsible for providing assistance to victims of SEA perpetrated by their own personnel. This conflation of roles underscores the fact that these entities have not established or designated this critical role within their own organizational structures. **As the Victims' Rights Advocate holds a system-wide mandate rather than an operational role within individual organizations, the Inspectors advise the United Nations Secretariat, UNCTAD, UNEP, UN-Habitat and UNODC to assign roles and responsibilities within their own structures for providing assistance to victims of SEA perpetrated by their own personnel, and to clearly define these responsibilities to ensure effective support in line with a victim-centred approach.**



39. Although much has been accomplished in terms of tools and materials for PSEA, the current inter-agency coordination mechanisms have had active participation largely from operational entities in humanitarian and development contexts, with limited involvement from normative and headquarters-based organizations. Some entities perceive SEA as irrelevant to their work, despite confirmed cases across operational contexts, including at headquarters locations. Conversely, inter-agency coordination with regard to sexual harassment through the CEB mechanism has been able to secure high-level participation from all CEB member organizations.

40. United Nations inter-agency coordination would benefit from addressing SEA and sexual harassment, writ large, under the broader framework of sexual misconduct. This approach would likely lead to wider and more consistent participation in inter-agency coordination mechanisms from organizations. Greater coordination and resource allocation toward addressing sexual misconduct could likely achieve more in terms of policy development and harmonization, prevention and training than the current separate efforts have produced.

41. The strategy proposed by the Secretary-General in 2017 (see [A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)) laid the foundational groundwork and was appropriate for its time, but evolving challenges and gaps in policy coherence, prevention and victim-centred responses now require a more updated, system-wide strategy focused on personnel conduct and broader inter-agency engagement. The following recommendation, which is complemented by recommendation 15 in section IX, is intended to build on system-wide efforts to address SEA and sexual harassment and to promote inter-agency coordination and coherence for a new approach and strategy to address 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.**

## **B. System-wide data collection and reporting on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse**

42. Transparency in reporting SEA allegations involving United Nations personnel has improved through the Secretary-General's annual report on special measures for PSEA, which relies on data from two main sources: (a) the database in the "Conduct in UN field missions" website, which collects SEA allegations against personnel of peacekeeping operations and special political missions; and (b) the iReport SEA Tracker,<sup>1</sup> which records allegations involving United Nations staff and affiliate

<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/data-allegations-un-system-wide>.

personnel, personnel of implementing partners, and non-United Nations forces working under a Security Council mandate.

43. Participating organizations have noted inconsistencies in the recording of allegation data in the iReport SEA Tracker, including when data is entered, what is included and how often data is updated. The database also does not disaggregate by type of implementing partner, even though this category accounts for the largest share of allegations. Relatedly, the database provides limited information with regard to vendor-related SEA allegations as there is no dedicated category that covers them. The Inspectors also see opportunities to improve transparency in the iReport SEA Tracker through the inclusion of details regarding case timelines, criminal referrals, final outcomes in substantiated cases, victim and community support, and efforts to ensure full, system-wide participation. The following recommendation is intended to enhance system-wide coherence, harmonization and transparency of SEA data.

#### **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.**

### **C. Access to sexual exploitation and abuse data and transparency with respect to allegations**

44. Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators as well as inter-agency PSEA coordinators reported limited awareness of their ability to access reports of anonymized SEA allegations specific to their countries. Many rely on sporadic updates from United Nations country team members. **The Inspectors advise the Special Coordinator to ensure systematic reporting on SEA allegations to the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators and inter-agency PSEA coordinators, particularly to support the development of annual PSEA action plans.**

45. The review found that several organizations were not recording SEA allegations within the central databases and that more than 100 SEA allegations handled by the Office of Internal Oversight Services had not been publicly reported in the Secretary-General's annual report on special measures for PSEA, the iReport SEA Tracker nor the "Conduct in UN field missions" database. These are allegations involving personnel of the United Nations Secretariat, UNCTAD, UNEP, UNODC, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the International Trade Centre (ITC) and their implementing partners.

46. This omission was previously highlighted in a 2021 evaluation of PSEA by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services. However, the Office's related recommendation was not accepted by the United Nations Secretariat on the grounds that the General Assembly had not requested such reporting. This reflects broader issues in terms of both the lack of harmonized SEA data across the United Nations system and the lack of transparency in the Secretariat and the above-mentioned entities. The following recommendation is intended to harmonize reporting and

provide Member States with full transparency with respect to SEA allegations received in all Secretariat entities:

#### **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.**

## **IV. Implementing strategies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the commitment of leadership**

47. The Secretary-General's 2017 strategy (see [A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)) emphasized leadership and capacity development as central to addressing SEA across the United Nations system. This section highlights how leadership commitment is reflected in organizational priorities and the institutionalization of PSEA efforts.

### **A. Accountability and capacities at the organizational level**

48. Most participating organizations routinely submit annual management letters concerning PSEA activities to the Secretary-General, helping to sustain the attention of leadership with regard to the issue. However, the content and quality of these letters varies. Few contain meaningful analysis or reflection, and the absence of feedback has reduced their perceived utility. Inconsistencies in data and limited details on victim assistance highlight broader concerns about transparency and uniformity. **The Secretary-General should ensure that these letters are stored in a centralized, publicly accessible repository and should request that they give greater emphasis to reflections regarding responses to SEA and how victims' rights are upheld.**

49. Nine organizations have incorporated indicators related to PSEA into their corporate results framework. This good practice increases visibility of PSEA and serves to institutionalize it within organizational strategies, enabling monitoring and tracking of progress across all levels.

50. Most JIU participating organizations have defined roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms for PSEA, often within ethics, human resources or legal units. A few organizations, such as UNDP, UNHCR, WFP and WHO, have elevated these functions to executive offices, increasing the visibility of the issue as well as coordination and leadership engagement.

51. Organizations with field operations have notably strengthened human resource capacity in the area of PSEA. As at 31 March 2025, there were 40 full-time positions across 11 organizations dedicated to PSEA at their headquarters and 90 positions located in regional and country offices. Over 2,000 personnel also support PSEA efforts on a part-time basis, reflecting organizational commitment to this critical area. However, such human resource investments remain limited at headquarters-based organizations.

### **B. Accountability and capacities in the field**

52. Many participating organizations formally delegate accountability for PSEA to senior management outside headquarters, reinforcing its institutionalization. Given

that most SEA allegations occur in field contexts, clear delegation of accountability and resources for senior field management is essential. **The Inspectors call on JIU participating organizations with a field presence that have not yet done so to consider formally delegating roles and responsibilities related to PSEA to senior management outside headquarters and providing necessary resources.**

53. PSEA coordinators and focal points in the field face significant resource challenges, limiting their effectiveness. Most hold these roles in addition to other duties, lack sufficient support and receive limited role-specific training. Funding is also a major issue. These challenges undermine the effectiveness of PSEA activities.

54. Inter-agency PSEA coordinator positions, which are critical to supporting the accountability of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators and the cohesion of United Nations country teams, often must contend with unstable funding. These individuals play a crucial role in coordinating PSEA efforts with country team members, engaging with local partners and advancing the implementation of action plans. When such positions are discontinued, valuable institutional knowledge and inter-agency coordination capacity are often lost. The following recommendation aims to prioritize and standardize inter-agency PSEA coordination within Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator offices in high-risk countries.

#### **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.**

## **V. Addressing the conduct of United Nations system personnel through training, outreach and change management**

55. Ensuring that personnel clearly understand expected standards of conduct and the consequences of violating them is critical to effectively implementing PSEA measures. This section examines measures taken by participating organizations to manage the conduct of their personnel as well as those of implementing partners and vendors.

### **A. Training and awareness-raising with respect to policies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for United Nations personnel**

56. Most United Nations system organizations provide mandatory training specifically on PSEA for their personnel, though six do not. Several organizations impose consequences for failing to complete the mandatory training, which is a good practice. In 16 organizations, PSEA training is also mandatory for affiliate personnel. **Since affiliate personnel play a vital role in supporting the United Nations in fulfilling its mandate, participating organizations are encouraged to require PSEA training for their affiliate personnel.**

57. While mandatory PSEA training is essential and includes some cultural and social context, making the content personally relevant to all participants remains a challenge. Supplementary, context-specific training and awareness-raising activities can improve understanding and foster a culture of compliance. **Participating**

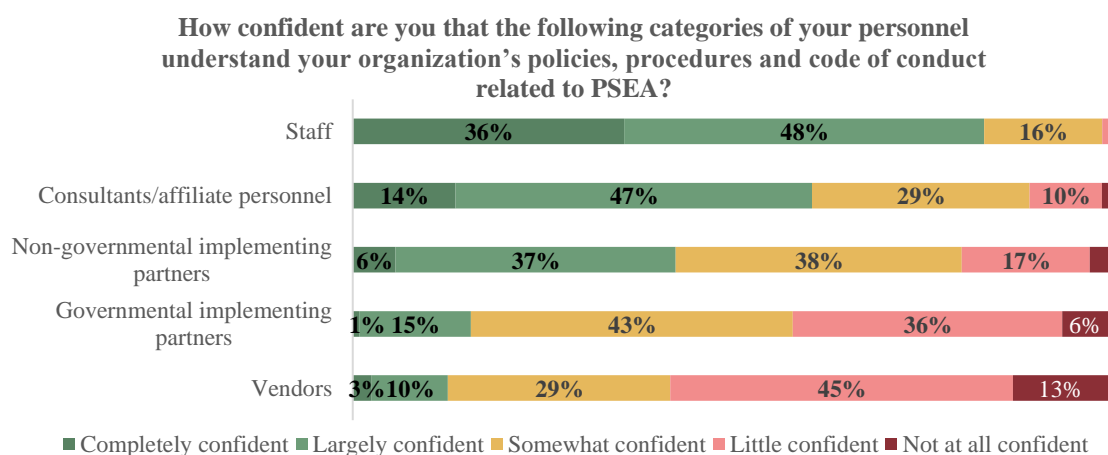
**organizations are encouraged to initiate or continue providing mandatory PSEA training while also delivering additional, context-specific capacity-building and awareness-raising activities for their personnel and ensuring that a victim-centred approach is incorporated.**

58. Training for implementing partner personnel is inconsistently delivered and monitored. Field offices manage capacity development, but their effectiveness depends on their capacity dedicated to PSEA, which varies widely. PSEA training for vendor personnel is also extremely limited.

59. Surveyed PSEA focal points reported low levels of confidence in the understanding of government implementing partners, vendors and non-governmental partners of United Nations PSEA policies and their adherence to such policies. In contrast, the focal points reported much higher levels confidence with respect to United Nations system staff and affiliate personnel (see figures II and III below). **JIU participating organizations are encouraged to develop and implement outreach and training materials tailored to government implementing partners and vendors.**

Figure II

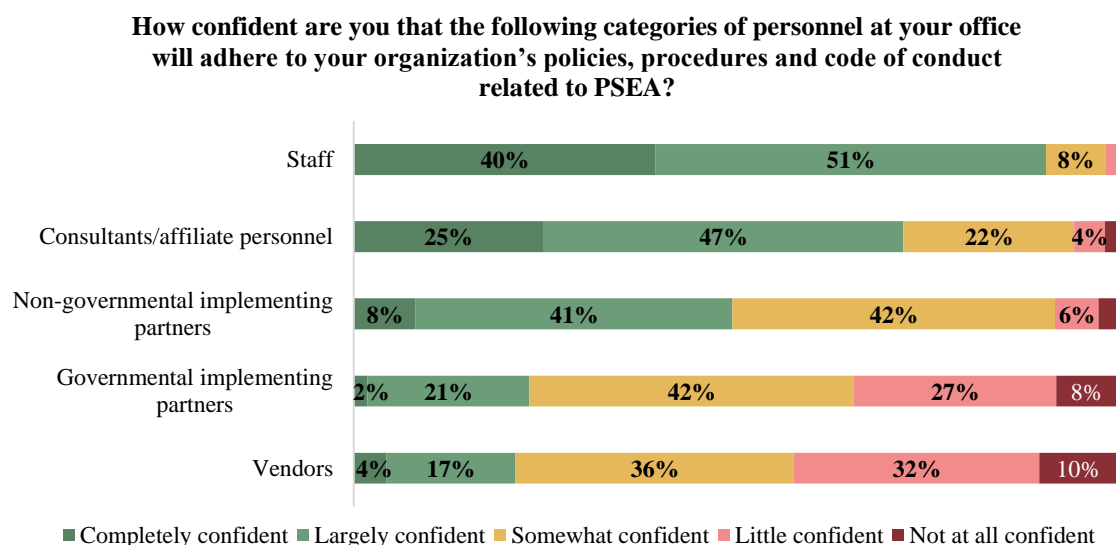
**Level of confidence of focal points for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in personnel's understanding of the organization's policies, procedures and code of conduct related to sexual exploitation and abuse, by category of personnel**



Source: JIU survey of PSEA focal points of JIU participating organizations in case study locations.

Figure III

**Level of confidence of focal points for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in personnel's adherence to the organization's policies, procedures and code of conduct related to sexual exploitation and abuse, by category of personnel**



Source: JIU survey of PSEA focal points of JIU participating organizations in case study locations.

## **B. Beyond mandatory training: innovative prevention strategies addressing the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse**

60. Mandatory PSEA training is essential for helping personnel understand their organization's policy concerning PSEA but is insufficient to address the complex and multi-systemic drivers of SEA. Some JIU participating organizations are beginning to integrate organizational culture change into their prevention strategies. Promoting respectful workplaces and encouraging a "speak-up" culture contribute in a more lasting way to fostering an environment that helps prevent sexual misconduct.

61. Evaluations covering sexual misconduct have found that resistance from middle management and field operations frequently hinders effective implementation of PSEA policy. Applying change management principles, as UNHCR and WHO have done, can support more effective implementation of a sexual misconduct policy. **The Inspectors encourage executive heads to use change management principles to implement updated policies and procedures for the prevention of and response to sexual misconduct, including using context-specific training for their personnel and innovative outreach strategies.**

## **VI. Safe recruitment practices: screening and vetting personnel for sexual misconduct**

62. The United Nations has a duty of care to prevent harm by ensuring that personnel meet high ethical standards. This section examines how JIU participating organizations prevent the recruitment of individuals with a known history of sexual misconduct and support accountability through system-wide tools.

## A. ClearCheck: the system-wide screening database on sexual misconduct

63. Introduced in 2018 as part of the Secretary General's new approach to PSEA, ClearCheck is a screening database that functions as a key mechanism to prevent the reemployment of individuals dismissed for substantiated incidents of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment. As at 15 January 2025, ClearCheck contained 899 individuals, 629 of whom (70 per cent) had been entered into the database for substantiated allegations of SEA.

64. Despite the importance of ClearCheck, its use for screening new candidates remains inconsistent. Fifteen JIU participating organizations lack standard operating procedures for its use. **The Inspectors call on JIU participating organizations that do not yet have their own standard operating procedures for ClearCheck to develop such procedures, reflecting their own context, policies and functions.**

65. Screening practices also vary by personnel category. While all participating organizations use ClearCheck for international professional positions, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNICEF, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and WMO only do so when a candidate discloses prior United Nations system employment. Screening for nationally recruited staff is less consistent: the International Labour Organization (ILO), UPU and WMO do not conduct such checks at all, and several others do so only when a candidate's prior United Nations affiliation is known.

66. Screening of affiliate personnel is even more limited. Only 14 participating organizations make use of ClearCheck for this category, leaving remaining organizations exposed to the potential risks of hiring individuals with a history of sexual misconduct. In this regard, **participating organizations should, at a minimum, apply risk-based criteria to determine the scope of their ClearCheck processes, ensuring thorough vetting of affiliate personnel who have access to beneficiaries or other vulnerable populations.**

67. The effectiveness of ClearCheck is further undermined by inconsistent practices for entering and removing names from the database. Some organizations do not enter individuals who resign during investigations, whereas others, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and UNDP, go further by entering individuals who were later found to have criminal convictions for sexual offences. Although procedures for removing names from ClearCheck are generally harmonized across organizations, the Inspectors found that the United Nations Secretariat applies a different interpretation, removing names only when explicitly ordered by an administrative tribunal. Greater consistency is necessary to preserve the integrity of ClearCheck and uphold due process for United Nations staff.

68. To maximize the utility of ClearCheck and to mitigate risks related to SEA and sexual harassment, participating organizations must consistently screen all personnel categories, align practices for entering and removing names, and explore expanding screening to other forms of misconduct. This requires both individual organizational actions and collective coordination through an inter-agency forum facilitated by CEB mechanisms. The following recommendation is intended to promote coherence and harmonization of ClearCheck practices across participating organizations and system wide.

**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.**

**B. Beyond ClearCheck**

69. A significant gap in candidate screening remains with respect to individuals with no prior experience in United Nations system organizations. Only four JIU participating organizations – UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNHCR and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) – complement their vetting process by using the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme (MDS), a reference-checking tool that connects with over 300 civil society organizations.

70. The United Nations system has a responsibility to share relevant information on former personnel recorded in ClearCheck with external employers. However, ClearCheck is accessible only to participating United Nations system organizations, and only the four entities that use the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme can verify whether their former personnel are listed in ClearCheck at the request of Misconduct Disclosure Scheme members. Beyond this, no system-wide, formal mechanism exists to prevent individuals recorded in ClearCheck from being employed by external organizations, including implementing partners and vendors. Although still in its pilot stage, Project Soteria of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) could complement both ClearCheck and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme for screening candidates without prior United Nations experience. **JIU participating organizations should consider participating in the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme and Project Soteria in order to vet candidates who have worked in non-governmental and civil society organizations as well as sharing information on subjects entered into ClearCheck with members of the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme and Project Soteria.**

71. Essentially, all JIU participating organizations have gaps in their vetting of personnel for a possible history of sexual misconduct. The following recommendation aims to close these gaps.

**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.**



## VII. Assessments of risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and mitigation measures

72. Risk assessments are essential in identifying and mitigating SEA risks inherent in United Nations operations. Given the vulnerabilities of populations served, the prevailing power imbalances and organizations' engagement with a wide range of implementing partners and vendors, SEA remains a persistent risk that affects not only individual organizations but the entire system. This section examines how JIU participating organizations assess and address SEA risks within their operations and through their partnerships.

### A. Risk assessments at the organizational level

73. Nineteen participating organizations include SEA in their enterprise risk catalogues, which is evidence of its institutionalization within their operational and policy frameworks. However, the approaches differ, as some treat SEA as a personnel conduct issue while others view it as part of broader safeguarding concerns. The remaining organizations do not explicitly address SEA in their risk management, often citing limited field engagement, or placing it under other categories, such as ethics or sexual harassment.

### B. Risk assessments in the field

74. Several tools have been developed to facilitate SEA-specific risk assessments in field settings for use at the office, programme and project levels; such tools can also complement enterprise risk management processes. While some progress is evident, particularly in peacekeeping contexts, uptake remains limited to a few entities and/or specific operational levels.

75. An analysis of PSEA action plans indicates that most lack prioritization and contextual relevance, often due to the absence of SEA risk assessments, rigid templates and limited access to allegation data. These gaps hinder meaningful risk-based planning and implementation.

76. Effective prevention requires a graded approach: the intensity of efforts and resources should correspond to assessed risk levels. **The Inspectors commend the efforts of some participating organizations in developing SEA risk assessment methodologies. However, the frequency and depth of these assessments require further examination, as these directly influence the quality and effectiveness of PSEA action plans.**

### C. Screening and vetting processes for implementing partners and commercial vendors

77. The 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin defines PSEA-related responsibilities of non-United Nations entities and individuals entering into a cooperative agreement with the United Nations. These responsibilities include accepting and adhering to the standards of conduct outlined in the bulletin, implementing preventive measures with regard to SEA, investigating allegations and taking corrective action when SEA occurs.

78. Of the 24 JIU participating organizations that work with implementing partners, all but the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), ITC, UPU and WMO include PSEA provisions in their cooperative agreements with implementing partners.

These clauses formally assign responsibility for prevention and response. **Participating organizations should review their current cooperative agreements and strengthen the accountability of implementing partners for PSEA, while ensuring the incorporation of a victim-centred approach.**

79. Practices for assessing the capacity for PSEA of implementing partners vary across participating organizations. Eight organizations use a harmonized tool linked to the UN Partner Portal, promoting efficiency and mutual recognition. Others rely on agency-specific tools, while, to date, 11 organizations do not conduct assessments at all. **JIU participating organizations are encouraged to establish, at minimum, a risk-based screening process and/or a set of minimum requirements for their implementing partners with respect to PSEA capacity.**

80. Significant gaps remain in assessing and strengthening PSEA capacity of government implementing partners, which are critical to United Nations operations. Certain behaviours prohibited by the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin, such as underage marriages and solicitation of commercial sex, remain legal or culturally accepted in many locations. Sexual exploitation is not always classified as a criminal offence, complicating accountability efforts. The Inspectors welcome the endorsement of a PSEA model clause to be included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which, when signed with host Governments, would demonstrate a high-level, joint commitment to PSEA and facilitate engagement between United Nations entities and national counterparts with regard to PSEA.

81. Commercial vendors, with whom the United Nations engages extensively, are not adequately assessed for their capacity for PSEA, especially in humanitarian and peace settings. Twenty-two participating organizations screen vendors against the ineligibility list of the United Nations Global Marketplace, but it remains unclear how many vendors are flagged for SEA-related offenses.

82. While most vendor contracts include PSEA provisions (including the acceptance of the United Nations Supplier Code of Conduct), enforcement varies. Notably, 16 participating organizations still allow underage marriage exceptions in vendor contracts, mirroring outdated provisions in the 2003 Secretary-General's bulletin. This exemption has already been removed from most organizations' staff regulations and rules. **Participating organizations should update their contractual terms and conditions accordingly and consider taking action to align their contractual terms and conditions with the upcoming revision of the 2003 bulletin.**

83. SEA allegations against vendor personnel are not systematically tracked and reported, and no mechanisms exist to prevent the re-employment of vendor employees dismissed for SEA. **A risk-based approach should be adopted to prioritize the assessment of capacities for PSEA of vendors that pose a high risk of SEA.**

84. Critical knowledge gaps persist especially with regard to SEA risks posed by government implementing partners and vendors. Some organizations also fail to acknowledge SEA as relevant to their operational environment. From a risk management perspective, SEA must be addressed proactively, regardless of its likelihood to occur, due to the severe consequences of such conduct. In the context of growing financial constraints, proactive PSEA risk assessments are more essential than ever, as reduced resources can heighten vulnerabilities and weaken response capacities. The following recommendation is intended to enhance accountability and mitigate the risk of SEA in participating organizations.

**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.**

## **VIII. Responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse**

85. “Zero tolerance for inaction” with respect to SEA must mean more than simply responding to allegations; it requires timely, effective, transparent and victim-centred actions. This section examines the mechanisms used by JIU participating organizations to receive complaints, conduct investigations, apply disciplinary measures and provide victim assistance.

### **A. Mechanisms for reporting and handling complaints at participating organizations**

86. All JIU participating organizations have established channels to receive complaints, including SEA allegations. While many claim to prioritize SEA cases, only a few have established timelines to conduct intake assessments of SEA allegations, leading to variability in their responsiveness.

87. In field locations, multiple channels to report SEA are made available at both the inter-agency and individual organizational levels; however, their adequacy and suitability remain uneven and barriers to reporting SEA persist. The effectiveness of reporting channels is highly context specific, and simply increasing the number of channels does not guarantee accessibility or encourage reporting. A victim-centred approach is crucial to understanding and addressing victims’ needs and preferences while removing barriers to reporting. **Participating organizations should conduct regular consultations with target populations on their access to complaint channels, also in collaboration with the respective inter-agency PSEA network.**

### **B. Investigating allegations**

88. Since 2017, the overall human resource capacity for investigating misconduct in JIU participating organizations has nearly doubled, with the proportion of investigators qualified to conduct sexual misconduct investigations increasing from 67 per cent in 2017 to 77 per cent in 2023. This demonstrates that strong organizational efforts have been taken to build capacity. This growth appears to align with the rising number of allegations, which in 2024 were 4.6 times higher than the number of allegations in 2017 involving staff and affiliate personnel.

89. Of the 19 investigation units within JIU participating organizations, all except that of the IMO reported taking steps to safeguard victims’ rights during sexual misconduct investigations. However, fewer than half have formal protocols outlining specific roles, responsibilities and performance benchmarks. Only a few organizations have set a minimum requirement for how often victims must be kept informed throughout the investigation process. **The investigation units that have**

**not yet done so should formulate a protocol or a standard operating procedure to formalize a victim-centred approach in their investigations.**

90. A major challenge in conducting SEA investigations is that many times victims do not consent to participate in the investigation. This leads to difficulty in gathering sufficient evidence to substantiate a case, further complicating the already complex nature of SEA investigations.

91. While cooperative agreements assign implementing partners the responsibility to prevent and respond to SEA, many, especially national and community-based organizations, lack the capacity to fulfil these obligations. Despite the shared responsibility for PSEA, only a few organizations have provided systematic and consistent support to their implementing partners. **Given that a significant proportion of SEA allegations involves implementing partner personnel, participating organizations should consider providing systematic support to strengthen the investigative capacity of implementing partners, including the incorporation of a victim-centred approach.**

92. Participating organizations also face limitations in investigating personnel of government implementing partners. Enforcement of provisions for PSEA in cooperative agreements is difficult as United Nations organizations lack jurisdiction over such personnel. This challenge is particularly pronounced in humanitarian and life-saving contexts.

### **C. Administrative and disciplinary measures for substantiated allegations**

93. A few participating organizations have established formal timelines for disciplinary proceedings in substantiated sexual misconduct cases, ranging from 60 to 180 days. In practice, though, the process often takes much longer. An analysis of 34 cases found a median investigation time of 234 days and a median duration of 323 days for disciplinary proceedings, with three cases exceeding 1,000 days or nearly 3 years. **The Inspectors urge participating organizations to establish a defined timeline for determining disciplinary measures to be applied in sexual misconduct cases.**

94. Administrative leave, especially without pay, for staff under investigation for SEA is inconsistently applied, despite its potential to protect victims, witnesses and organizational integrity. Between 2019 and 2023, out of 336 staff members investigated for SEA, 53 were placed on administrative leave with pay and 28 without pay. Placing individuals with a strong probability of having committed SEA on administrative leave without pay not only enables the organization to implement a protective measure but also reinforces its commitment to combating sexual misconduct and ending impunity. While acknowledging the rights of staff under investigation, the presumption of innocence and the potential hardship that administrative leave without pay may impose, **the Inspectors believe that a more rigorous approach could be adopted to impose administrative leave without pay when the established criteria are met.**

95. Victims are not consistently kept informed throughout the disciplinary process. While some investigation units notify victims of key milestones in their process to ensure that victims or complainants are kept informed, few organizations extend this practice into the disciplinary phase. Victims have a right to be informed throughout the process, including its final outcome.

96. The inconsistent application of administrative leave, disciplinary actions and victim communication protocols fosters perceptions of impunity and undermines

accountability. The following recommendation is intended to enhance transparency and accountability.

#### **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.**

### **D. Assistance to victims**

97. While in principle inter-agency mechanisms for victim assistance are largely established in field locations, implementation of such mechanisms remains fragmented and significantly constrained by limited resources. This shortfall undermines the application of the United Nations victims' rights statement, which affirms victims' rights to tailored support, and highlights a significant gap in the ability of United Nations system organizations to fully uphold such commitments.

98. The prevailing view that SEA is anomalous, rather than systemic, contributes to insufficient resource allocation for victim assistance. Some contexts, data show, face inherently higher SEA risks, with allegations consistently reported in the same specific locations annually. Yet few organizations proactively plan or budget for victim assistance. In addition, there is a lack of understanding of victim assistance, as well as a system-wide approach to such assistance beyond the provision of immediate support. The 2019 United Nations protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of SEA sets out key principles, including ensuring that assistance is victim-centred, rights-based, inclusive and culturally appropriate, while upholding the "do no harm" principle and safeguarding victims' privacy and confidentiality. However, the protocol primarily focuses on immediate assistance, offering guidance on supporting victims in the aftermath of SEA incidents. The extent to which United Nations entities should continue providing support beyond immediate assistance, however, remains undefined. **The Victims' Rights Advocate should lead the revision of the 2019 protocol to clarify the United Nations system's approach to victim assistance, aiming to align it with the United Nations victims' rights statement.**

99. Given persistent resource constraints, securing additional funding for victim assistance is unlikely. Although perpetrators should be held individually accountable and responsible, the investigation and disciplinary processes are often complex and lengthy, with no mechanism for victims to claim reparations. One possibility is to repurpose savings gained from placing subjects under investigation or undergoing disciplinary proceedings for SEA on administrative leave without pay or from the entitlements of dismissed staff.

100. An inter-agency pooled fund could provide a viable mechanism for both immediate and long-term support for victims of SEA. While the idea has been discussed in system-wide forums and endorsed by some executive heads, it would require clear governance, careful planning and consensus on the types, duration and recipients of assistance, and it would need to be aligned with a system-wide agreed approach to victim assistance. The following recommendation aims to enhance system-wide coherence and coordination with regard to assistance to SEA victims.

**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.**

## **IX. Engagement with governing bodies and Member States on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse**

101. Governing bodies and Member States play a critical role in advancing PSEA by holding United Nations system organizations accountable. Their collective action can reinforce prevention, improve responses and support stronger policies and practices. This section highlights opportunities for deeper engagement.

### **A. Coverage of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by governing and legislative bodies**

102. PSEA is regularly addressed in most meetings of governing and legislative bodies, with all JIU participating organizations either reporting on SEA allegations or indicating they would if relevant cases should arise. A key accountability tool is a report on disciplinary measures taken by the administration based on substantiated allegations, which reinforces leadership commitment to accountability and operationalizes the principle of zero tolerance.

103. The JIU has addressed these types of documents in three previous reviews and the Inspectors note that some of the reports on disciplinary measures submitted to governing and legislative bodies offer examples of good practices, such as indicating whether the subject was added to the ClearCheck database and providing information regarding any assistance provided to victims as well as potential criminal referrals submitted to national authorities. The following recommendation is intended to foster further accountability in participating organizations.

**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.**

### **B. Criminal referrals to national authorities**

104. In its resolution [62/63](#), the General Assembly directs the Secretary-General to refer allegations of crimes committed by United Nations officials to the States whose nationals are subjects of such allegations and urges States to investigate and prosecute crimes of a serious nature committed by such officials and take appropriate measures

to ensure justice. The Assembly also calls for an annual report on criminal referrals made by the United Nations and the actions taken by Member States. However, the Inspectors note that Member States do not consistently report on the outcomes of such referrals. **The Inspectors respectfully request Member States to provide timely and detailed updates on the criminal cases that have been referred to them, in order to enhance transparency and accountability within the United Nations system with regard to its personnel with substantiated SEA allegations.**

105. Accountability is more frequently achieved for uniformed personnel. Between 2017 and 2024, of the 274 uniformed personnel with substantiated SEA allegations, 236 were repatriated by the United Nations and 84 were subject to jail sentences imposed by their respective Governments. In contrast, only one referral of civilian personnel outside peace operations to national authorities has resulted in criminal accountability.

106. Referrals of substantiated SEA allegations to national authorities are rare among United Nations specialized agencies, with WHO being the only one to have made such a referral. According to legal officers interviewed, it is uncommon for any type of misconduct to be referred to national authorities.

107. Specialized agencies should adopt procedures to make criminal referrals concerning SEA allegations to national authorities that are consistent with General Assembly resolution [62/63](#) and tailored to their legal frameworks. **The Inspectors encourage governing bodies of specialized agencies that do not have in place proper policies and procedures that are based on their legal frameworks and aligned with principles, such as taking a victim-centred approach, to request that their executive heads establish policies and/or procedures for making criminal referrals concerning SEA allegations to national authorities.**

### **C. Member States: United Nations peacekeeping and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse**

108. The trend towards deploying non-United Nations forces rather than traditional peacekeeping missions to fulfil Security Council mandates presents significant challenges with respect to the United Nations role in promoting PSEA. Such forces operate outside the United Nations accountability framework, yet their actions can still result in reputational and moral harm to the Organization. Although recent Security Council resolutions have begun to include provisions related to PSEA, coordination and alignment with United Nations standards remain inconsistent. As such deployments become more common, there is a pressing need for clearer and more coherent policies. **Member States should proactively engage with the United Nations Secretariat to address the gaps in policies and procedures inherent in the deployment of troops under the auspices of the Security Council and develop policies and training with regard to PSEA that will apply to all non-United Nations forces operating under a United Nations mandate.**

109. Paternity cases related to SEA remain largely unresolved. As at March 2025, 759 paternity claims had been recorded in the United Nations Secretariat's database, of which paternity had been established for only 29. An astounding 519 claims were pending a resolution with regard to the recognition of paternity, while 211 cases had either not been established or had been withdrawn. Most of these cases involved uniformed personnel. The legal processes for determining paternity, let alone resolving child support claims, are precarious and include DNA testing, which may not be available and/or legal in some countries. Secretariat officials interviewed are frustrated with the results of the current process for handling paternity claims and there appears to be a lack of clarity in terms of the respective roles and responsibilities

of the Secretariat, Member States and the subjects of claims in the handling of paternity cases.

110. The following recommendation is intended to promote high-level engagement from Member States and the United Nations Secretariat to develop a new approach to paternity claims in peace operations that ensures greater accountability and effective resolution of cases.

**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.**

**D. Member States: supporting a new approach to protection against sexual exploitation and abuse**

111. Much of the present report reflects on the Secretary-General's 2017 strategy for PSEA (see [A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)), indicating what has worked and what has fallen short, including with respect to policies, prevention strategies, disciplinary procedures, response mechanisms and the application and integration of a victim-centred approach. A new approach to PSEA for the United Nations system requires Member States' cooperation and collaboration.

112. Inter-agency mechanisms should be mobilized to adopt a new approach to addressing SEA and sexual harassment and to develop an updated strategy. Member State endorsement is essential to ensure the legitimacy of such an updated strategy and new approach, to facilitate their implementation and to advance system-wide accountability.

113. The following recommendation, which is complemented by recommendation 4, is intended to enhance system-wide coordination to address sexual misconduct.

**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.**



## Annex

## Overview of actions to be taken by participating organizations on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit

			Participating organizations of the Joint Inspection Unit																											
		Intended impact	United Nations*	UNAIDS	UNCTAD	ITC	UNDP	UNEP	UNFPA	UN-Habitat	UNHCR	UNICEF	UNODC	UNOPS	UNRWA	UN-Women	WFP	FAO	IAEA	ICAO	ILO	IMO	ITU	UNESCO	UNIDO	UN Tourism	UPU	WHO	WIPO	WMO
Report	For action		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	For information		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation 1		a	E	E	E	E		E	E	E			E	E		E		E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 2		a	E		E	E	E	E	E	E			E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E		E	E
Recommendation 3		a	L	L	L		L	L	L	L			L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
Recommendation 4		a	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 5		d	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E



			Participating organizations of the Joint Inspection Unit																											
Report	For action	Intended impact	United Nations*	UNAIDS	UNCTAD	ITC	UNDP	UNEP	UNFPA	UN-Habitat	UNHCR	UNICEF	UNODC	UNOPS	UNRWA	UN-Women	WFP	FAO	IAEA	ICAO	ILO	IMO	ITU	UNESCO	UNIDO	UN Tourism	UPU	WHO	WIPO	WMO
	For information		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Recommendation 6		a	L																											
Recommendation 7		h	E																											
Recommendation 8		d	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 9		d	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 10		a	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 11		e	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 12		h	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Recommendation 13		a	L	L	L		L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
Recommendation 14		e	L																											
Recommendation 15		a	L																											

**Legend:**

L: Recommendation for decision by the legislative organ

E: Recommendation for action by the executive head

Recommendation does not require action by this organization

**Intended impact:**

a: Enhanced transparency and accountability; b: Dissemination of good/best practices; c: Enhanced coordination and cooperation; d: Strengthened coherence and harmonization; e: Enhanced control and compliance; f: Enhanced effectiveness; g: Significant financial savings; h: Enhanced efficiency; i: Other.

\* As listed in [ST/SGB/2015/3](#).