

**Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board of UN-Women
First Regular Session 2022**

“Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment – Update on the implementation of recommendations in the independent victim-centred review of UN-Women policies and processes on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment”

I. Introduction

1. Deeply rooted in gender inequality and other intersecting forms of discrimination, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) constitute fundamental human rights violations. Representing a profound betrayal of our mandate and values, SEA and SH are inadmissible behaviour at UN-Women. As such, the prevention of and response to SEA and SH have been and continue to be of highest priority for the entity.
2. To that end, UN-Women is steadfastly committed to pursuing the highest standards of governance frameworks and operations that ensure the effective addressing of SEA and SH across the organisation, by leveraging our experience and expertise as the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The undertaking of an independent, victim-centred review of our policies and procedures on tackling SEA and SH and implementation of the corresponding actions to apply the recommendations formed the focus of UN-Women’s efforts in that regard from 2019-2021.
3. The completion of all 12 recommendations was achieved in June 2021, marking a milestone achievement for UN-Women’s strengthening of its response to SEA and SH.
4. Building on these efforts and the lessons learned from the implementation of the recommendations, UN-Women has continued to push to further improve its prevention of and response to SEA and SH across the organisation, while simultaneously expanding its engagement with system-wide efforts.
5. The Executive Board may wish to:
 - (i) welcome the implementation of all 12 recommendations of the independent, victim-centred review of UN-Women’s policies and procedures on tackling SEA and SH;
 - (ii) support UN-Women’s strong commitment to ensuring a victim-centred approach for SEA and SH by continuously improving its organisational prevention of and response to SEA and SH and by actively contributing to the system-wide framework to addressing SEA and SH across the UN;

II. Key Updates

- A. *Complete implementation of the recommendations of the independent, victim-centred review of UN-Women’s policies and procedures on tackling SEA and SH*
6. For the first year of the implementation of the recommendations of the independent victim-centred review of its policies and procedures on tackling SEA and SH, UN-

Women focused on strengthening its governance, policy, and accountability structures. This work, *inter alia*, included: the update of its policy on Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Abuse of Authority, which is augmented by 3 role-based guidance for supervisors, affected individuals, and alleged perpetrators, in line with the UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment; and the promulgation of a revised procedure for selecting programme partners and the accompanying new partner agreement template, in line with the UN Protocol on allegations of SEA involving implementing partners. A complete report with details on all the actions taken during the first year, resulting in a 60% implementation of the recommendations, is provided in the [2020 UN-Women Executive Board Annual Session update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the independent victim-centred review of UN-Women's policies and procedures on tackling SEA and SH](#).

7. For the second year of implementation of the recommendations, UN-Women concentrated its efforts on the operationalisation of its improved framework to tackle SEA and SH across all levels of the organisation. To maximise effectiveness and relevance for the different operational contexts, UN-Women prioritised leveraging existing resources and capacities in its regional and country offices from previously undertaken work on SEA and SH. Furthermore, the entity sought to ensure a coordinated application of processes, cohesive to its regional and country offices, while also guaranteeing alignment with the UN system-wide approach and the collective PSEA strategy and in-country action plan overseen by the respective Resident Coordinators (RCs)/ UN Country teams (UNCT). A full account of all actions taken to fulfil the remaining commitments to achieve 100 % completion of all recommendations is detailed in the [2021 UN-Women Executive Board Annual Session update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the independent victim-centred review of UN-Women's policies and procedures on tackling SEA and SH](#).

B. Continued strengthening of the prevention of and response to SEA and SH within UN-Women and across the UN system, using a victim-centred approach

8. Since the completion of the implementation of the recommendations of the independent, victim-centred review of our policies and procedures on tackling SEA in June 2021, UN-Women has continued to push to further improve the prevention of and response to sexual misconduct within our entity and across the UN system, building on the efforts and the lessons learned from these past 2 years.

9. In light of the particularly high risks of SEA and SH experienced by women and girls, UN-Women, in line with our mandate, strongly believes that placing their needs and priorities at the forefront of any response is of utmost importance. A victim/survivor-centred approach thus has been at the heart of all our efforts and continuing to advance and implement such an approach across the system remains to be a top priority.

10. To further enhance UN-Women's PSEA and SH policy and governance framework, UN-Women promulgated a French and Spanish translation of its Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Abuse of Authority policy, ensuring better accessibility and clarity on the mechanisms in place and the respective roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders. Additionally, based on the generic Terms of References (TORs) for in-country PSEA focal points, developed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and endorsed by

the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in October 2021, UN-Women created its own TORs for UN-Women in-country PSEA focal points to systematise their role and clarify the duties and expectations stemming therefrom. Furthermore, UN-Women included the United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of SEA into its Policy, Procedure and Guidance repository, which aims to elaborate a common set of norms and standards based on existing frameworks to strengthen a coordinated system-wide approach. By making the protocol accessible to all UN-Women personnel, we ensure better coherence of UN-Women’s PSEA approach with the UN-system response and encourage greater harmonisation across all entities.

11. In an effort to strengthen the UN system-wide PSEA and SH approaches, UN-Women also continued to provide technical advice and input based on its expertise and experience stemming from its triple mandate. As a member of the CEB Task Force on SH, it actively participated in the development of a common understanding of a victim-centred approach, drawing upon, *inter alia*, learnings from its work externally with multi-sector partners in the Global Safe Cities Initiative and the Essential Services Global Programme, as well as the corresponding document on “Advancing a common understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to SH,” which puts forward a set of principles and strives to engender trust and confidence in victims/survivors to speak up when they experience sexual harassment. Moreover, UN-Women in its role as a permanent member of the UN-wide SEA Working Group, partook in the review of the draft technical note for a joint SEA risk assessment, which outlines key considerations on how to undertake such activity at the country-level.

12. To further enhance its SEA and SH prevention mechanisms, UN-Women continued to invest in awareness raising efforts of its personnel. It rolled out the first phase of its multi-phased communications campaign, through which it highlighted the key features of its updated Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Abuse of Authority policy and emphasised key concepts that make up the definition of sexual harassment. In addition, UN-Women has moved forward with the implementation of its successfully piloted scenario-based SEA and SH training workshops, using a staged approach with the 10 country offices with highest expressed needs forming part of stage 1. The workshops provide participating personnel with a contextualised understanding of the key SEA and SH definitions and concepts, the applicable UN-Women and UN system-wide SEA and SH policies and procedures, the different reporting mechanisms, due process, and potential consequences. Simultaneously, UN-Women hosted the 2021 UN Leadership Dialogue Programme “Accountability System in the UN: How do you understand and make it work?” to promote a robust ethical awareness and culture of integrity within the UN that contributes to an environment in which dignity and respect are the norms, free from sexual misconduct.

13. UN-Women also continued to actively engage in improvement efforts for the UN system-wide prevention of SEA and SH. Together with the CEB Task Force on Addressing SH, the UN Secretariat, and the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, UN-Women published a summary report of the key messages and concrete recommendations on how to prevent and ultimately eliminate SH in the UN system and beyond, based on 4 peer-to-peer dialogues, which it had co-organised as

co-lead of the Outreach and Knowledge Sharing workstream of the CEB Task Force on SH.

14. Furthermore, UN-Women further advanced its operationalisation efforts of its PSEA and SH frameworks at HQ, regional and country office levels to optimise the effectiveness thereof across the organisation. To ensure a streamlined completion of the mandatory vetting procedure for all UN-Women candidates and to prevent the rehiring of individuals with established allegations related to SEA and SH against them within the UN system, UN-Women designed an automated process for each region to vet all potential candidates using the UN-wide screening database, Clear Check. The innovative process guarantees operational standardisation, while providing transparency of key metrics such as average completion time. UN-Women presented this process to all other UN entities at a brown bag discussion organised by the Office of the Special Coordinator for PSEA, where it was received with great interest and enthusiasm.

15. In addition, UN-Women expanded its regional and country office PSEA and SH focal point network from 47 to 82 appointees. They continue to coordinate the implementation of the required key PSEA and SH activities in their respective country offices in direct collaboration with their heads of office. Capacity building has been offered to all newly appointed focal points, in addition to those who could not participate in the initial workshop, through a new inter-agency training program designed for in-country focal points, under the leadership of UNDP and with the participation of UN-Women, WFP, IOM, UNFPA, UNOPS, and WHO, with the aim of equipping PSEA focal points from around the globe with a better understanding of their role within their entity structure, as well as within their respective in-country PSEA networks.

16. Lastly, to reinforce coordination of its internal SH efforts, UN-Women, under the shared leadership of the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) section and the Human Resources (HR) department, updated the TOR of its internal task force to address sexual harassment, clarified its objectives and scope of work, and broadened its membership to include key stakeholders from across UN-Women from all geographical locations.

C. Promoting a culture change to address the root causes of SEA and SH

17. As the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, UN-Women recognises inequality and discrimination as the foundation of the continuum of violence against women and girls. To be able to tackle SEA and SH, which fall within that continuum, the root causes of gender inequality and intersecting forms of discrimination, including those due to race, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc., thus need to be addressed. To do so, a culture change is paramount.

18. As explained in our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, UN-Women seeks to nurture a diverse and empowered workforce and advance an inclusive culture as a key pillar of its high impact business model. We believe that a culture and leadership that exemplifies ethical, transformational, and shared principles affords UN-Women personnel the opportunity to reach their fullest potential and therefore become empowered to deliver the best possible results for the communities we serve.

Therefore, through an ongoing journey of strengthening transformational leadership, enhancing personnel skills, promoting diversity and inclusion, fostering accountability, and the upholding of the highest standards of conduct, which also includes the well-being and mental health of our personnel, UN-Women aspires to address the root causes of workplace concerns, including SH and SEA, to ensure that they are prevented and dealt with holistically.

19. Concretely, to strengthen UN-Women's workplace culture, the organisation is, *inter alia*, facilitating an event series entitled Conversations on Living our Values, through which it creates a space to reflect and discover together with its personnel what is important, based on UN-Women's current values and competencies framework, and what else is needed to consider in the creation of an inclusive workplace; strengthening the capacity of senior managers to cultivate and practice leadership that is transformational, feminist, and agile; promoting coaching skills and culture through peer network; and developing the capacity of teams and managers through co-creation. Other key initiatives include the participation in the development of the UN system-wide Health survey action plan, as well as the continued collaboration with the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programme through notably its Respectful Workplace Facilitators Programme, a confidential and informal peer support system, and its Conversation with the Mediator Programme which comprises a mediation training session as well as intake sessions, allowing all personnel to discuss their workplace concerns with a mediator.

20. Furthermore, to promote a change in culture across the UN system that eliminates SEA and SH, UN-Women has continued to assume an active role in that regard at the inter-agency level, leveraging its experience and expertise. As a member of Leadership and Culture workstream of the CEB Task Force on SH, UN-Women, in a joint effort with WFP, FAO, IAEA, IFAD, and UNHCR, launched a UN Culture Innovation Challenge, which aims to discover ideas to improve the workplace culture across all levels of the UN organisations and convert them into blueprints for culture change to end SH.

D. Measuring progress

21. To measure progress achieved and continuously improve UN-Women's prevention of and response to SEA and SH, the entity has put in place a robust monitoring framework.

22. Through corporate, regional, and in-country PSEA and SH action plans, UN-Women outlines the actions needed to achieve the yearly PSEA and SH goals. Through corporate annual management letters on PSEA and SH, which are complemented by local certifications of all regional and country-level representatives that they fulfilled their SEA and SH related duties, UN-Women certifies to the Secretary-General and the UN-Women Executive Board the completion of the required responsibilities for the organisation and provides information of key actions taken during the previous year.

23. In addition, UN-Women included a PSEA and SH dedicated key performance indicator in its 2022-2025 Strategic Plan Monitoring Framework, in line with the corresponding indicators from the 2021 QCPR. The indicator measures that UN-Women has taken all appropriate actions, in accordance with the established rules

and procedures, to prevent and address allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment against UN-Women personnel.

III. Conclusion

24. Despite the complete implementation of the recommendations of the independent, victim-centred review of its policies and procedures on tackling SEA and SH, UN-Women continues to prioritise the prevention of and response to SEA and SH within the entity and across the UN system and will do so for the years to come. Ensuring that a victim-centred approach is at the heart of all efforts and that a culture change be promoted to address the intersectional root causes of SEA and SH in a comprehensive way are of particular importance for UN-Women. To make certain that its efforts achieve the desired progress, a robust monitoring framework is in place, providing annual success metrics.