

Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board, Annual Session 2023

“Update on UN-Women policies and procedures to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment”

I. Introduction

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH) are forms of gender-based violence that are rooted in gender inequality and intersecting forms of discrimination, including those due to race, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, and sexual orientation. As such, UN-Women, the UN entity dedicated to gender equality, cannot tolerate SEA and SH to be perpetrated by the very system it forms part of. For this reason, the effective protection from SEA and SH internally and across the UN system have been and continue to be imperative for the organisation. This background note provides an update on UN-Women’s actions to prevent and respond to SEA and SH in its policies, procedures, and operations, including an analysis of its implementation of system-wide initiatives. Moreover, recognizing the imperativeness of a culture change that tackles the root causes of SEA and SH to truly progress in these efforts, this background note further furnishes an update on how UN-Women is improving its organisational culture to address the underlying causes of SEA and SH.

II. Update on UN-Women’s actions to prevent and respond to SEA and SH

A. PSEA and SH Policy and Governance

2. Since its last comprehensive update provided to the Executive Board in February 2023, UN-Women undertook a set of targeted efforts to further strengthen its policy and governance structures for addressing SEA and SH.

3. Following the mandatory review process for all the organisation’s policies, over the past year UN-Women ensured that its PSEA and SH policies remained up-to-date and accessible to all personnel. To coordinate their overall implementation across the organisation, UN-Women added a dedicated PSEA and SH Specialist position at entity-level to the organisation’s robust PSEA and SH architecture. This person is responsible for the provision of technical support and guidance on matters related to the internal prevention of and response to SEA and SH. Like in past years, the 2023 entity-level PSEA and SH Action Plans were developed based on the results of the 2022 PSEA Perception Survey and the 2022 SH Reporting surveys and in collaboration with inputs from all technical experts across UN-Women. A copy of the 2023 headquarters-level PSEA Action Plan is attached at Annex 1 as requested by EB decision 2022/2, paragraph 6. The organisation updated its network of regional and in-country PSEA and SH focal points, which as of May 1, 2023 counts with 118 appointees, covering all UN-Women duty stations. To maximize the clarity of their duties and expectations as focal points, UN-Women provided all of them with a copy of UN-Women’s in-

country PSEA Focal Point TORs, which is being translated into all official UN languages for greatest accessibility.

4. As part of the April 2022 revision of UN-Women's Selection of Programme Partners Procedure, the organisation modified the Risk-Based Capacity Assessment template to include an assessment of the partners' capacity on PSEA in line with the UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners (IP Protocol). Moreover, in September 2022 the organisation initiated the process of developing a new Programme Partner Management Policy, with the purpose of providing an overarching, coherent, unified and principle-based framework for programme partner management, focusing on objectives related to delivery of results, value for money and related accountability. The PSEA-specific obligations for partners were also included therein, further enhancing the policy and governance structures for this priority area. To avoid multiple assessments of common partners within the UN system, UN-Women is modifying its Selection of Programme Partners Procedure to allow for use of an existing SEA Assessment, completed using the common UN PSEA Assessment Tool, within a period of the last five years by other UN Agencies. In addition, in 2022, UN-Women has joined the UN Partner Portal (UNPP), designed to facilitate harmonized, efficient and easy collaboration between the UN and partners. The UNPP PSEA Module, once launched, will further streamline the use of other UN Agency SEA Assessments.

B. A victim/survivor-centred implementation of UN-Women's frameworks to address SEA and SH

5. As the effective prevention of SEA and SH is recognized as a core objective of UN-Women's PSEA and SH framework, over the past year UN-Women implemented a set of proactive measures that aim at applying a victim/survivor-centred approach across the organisation. Many of these were a continuation of previous and ongoing efforts.

6. To promote greater awareness and increased knowledge of PSEA and SH across the organisation, UN-Women continued to facilitate scenario-based PSEA and SH trainings in selected duty stations, in close collaboration with its regional Human Resources Partners. These workshops explore how key victim/survivor-centred concepts, policies, and procedures apply to real-life inspired scenarios. The original training was enhanced over the last year through the addition of micro-learning modules on power dynamics, intersectionality, and positive masculinities. Simultaneously, UN-Women continued updating its mandatory online training on addressing SH and abuse of authority. In addition, the organisation initiated the development of animated videos detailing different scenarios and depicting key elements of UN-Women's PSEA and SH framework, which will be used for virtual awareness raising campaigns across all offices.

7. To provide its in-country PSEA and SH focal points with key capacities for them to fulfill their responsibilities, in September 2022 UN-Women launched a regional focal point capacity building brown bag series, with sessions conducted on a quarterly basis. Each session is tailored to the specific needs of the region and aims to develop practical skills that help the focal points to more effectively operationalize UN-Women's PSEA and SH framework within their specific country context. In addition, UN-Women HQ has provided regional and country offices bilateral assistance with their PSEA and SH efforts through direct technical guidance and inputs supplied to in-country

focal points. A repository of best practice resources was further built within UN-Women's PSEA and SH Community of Practice and is being regularly updated.

8. To promote greater coordination and knowledge sharing on the effective prevention of and response to SH within the organisation, UN-Women's internal taskforce on addressing SH, co-ordinated by the Ending Violence Against Women Section and the Human Resources Division, convened 4 meetings and explored the topics of: a victim/survivor-centered approach to SH; what makes an effective SH training; the intersections between UN-Women's work on addressing SH and the efforts of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW); as well as the synergies between UN-Women's external work on tackling SH and its internal efforts.

9. UN-Women remains fully committed to a prompt and effective victim/survivor-centred response to any allegation of SEA and/or SH received. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which possesses extensive independent experience and infrastructure related to conducting SEA and SH investigations, has remained entrusted with the responsibility of providing investigation services to UN-Women. UN-Women continues to report the status of SEA investigations and their outcomes via the UN system-wide, publicly accessible iReport SEA tracker. Its Report on internal audit and investigation activities for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2022 further makes available key information on SEA and SH investigation results. UN-Women's 2022 Disciplinary Measures Report discloses the information on disciplinary decisions taken during the course of 2022. In addition, UN-Women complied with the requirements for UN entities on the sharing of information on SEA allegations with the most senior United Nations official in country, as applicable.

10. Assistance for victims/survivors of SEA, which prioritizes their rights and dignity, has been provided during the last year as soon as UN-Women was made aware of an allegation, upon consent of the affected individual, in line with United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Victim Assistance Protocol). Assistance includes referral to legal support, as well as safety, medical and psychosocial support. This was facilitated through UN-Women's in-country PSEA focal points, in collaboration with its in-country Elimination of Violence Against Women specialists. It was undertaken via the UN Country Team's established victim assistance mechanism/Gender Based Violence referral pathway in collaboration with Field Victims' Rights Advocates where present. Through this mechanism, UN-Women has achieved a full operationalization of the Victim Assistance Protocol.

C. Unequivocal leadership and accountability to tackle sexual misconduct within UN-Women and across the UN system

11. To hold itself accountable and exercise a leading role to put an end to SEA and SH across the UN system, over the past year UN-Women has implemented a set of strategic actions, many of which again build on existing initiatives.

12. In May 2023, UN-Women undertook its annual PSEA and SH management certification exercise for its Regional Directors and Country Representatives to ensure organisation-wide compliance with ST/SGB/2003/13 and UN-Women's Prevention of Harassment, Sexual

Harassment, Discrimination, and Abuse of Authority policy, which formed the basis of UN-Women's management letter to the Executive Board.

13. To hold perpetrators of SEA and SH to account, UN-Women has been a participant of Clear Check since its inception in 2018 with the aim to prevent re-employing perpetrators within the UN system. While no investigated allegation in 2022 involved sexual misconduct, thus requiring the entering of a perpetrator into the database, UN-Women has entered a total of 3 subjects into the database since 2018 with established allegations related to SEA and/or SH.

14. To ensure that all potential new hires are vetted for prior history of SEA and/or SH, UN-Women continued to screen all hiring candidates for previous involvement in sexual misconduct, using the Clear Check database and through reference checks before a contract is issued. To ensure a streamlined completion of the mandatory vetting procedure through Clear Check, UN-Women has been using an automated process for each region, which it created to maximize both efficiency and transparency.

15. To guarantee that SEA and SH safeguards are embedded into UN-Women's operations and programmes, UN-Women's 2022 risk review exercise, which forms part of the organisation's Enterprise Risk Management framework, included the systematic assessment of SEA and SH risks and establishment of response plans. All UN-Women 80 risk units (country and regional offices, responsible for implementation and/or oversight of programmes or projects, or headquarters functions/sections, responsible for oversight for and/or support to field offices in respect of the implementation of programmes or projects) included SEA and SH within their risk registers.

16. At HQ-level, UN-Women maintained a strong presence within the CEB Taskforce on Addressing Sexual Harassment (CEB Taskforce), where it continued to ensure that lessons learned from UN-Women's policy and programmatic work on ending SH, including through joint programmes with interagency partners (including, safe cities and safe public spaces initiative, victim centered approaches to sexual violence and gender responsive policing and essential services for survivors) are also translated in efforts to promote system wide approaches in ending SH in the UN System. Most recently these inputs have been provided to inform the development of a survey tool developed by the CEB Taskforce on survivor's experiences in formal and informal reporting. Additional contributions, including making use of UN-Women's holistic HR competence, were supplied on advancing a victim-centred approach, promoting behavioural change, and measuring data and results.

17. The Office of the Focal Point for Women at UN-Women represents the network of over 475 Gender Focal Points in the CEB Taskforce as well. UN-Women is therefore a key stakeholder in mainstreaming policies and guidance from this taskforce through its system-wide coordination and capacity-building for this network. In addition, the Office of the Focal Point has supported UN-Women's Deputy Executive Director for UN Coordination, Partnerships, Resources and Sustainability in the co-leading of the outreach and knowledge sharing efforts in the context of the CEB Taskforce. In this capacity, the Office of the Focal Point for UN-Women conducted eight peer-to-peer learning dialogues to foster knowledge sharing amongst UN Member States, UN entities, civil society representatives, academia, and international organisations. These dialogues focused on key aspects of addressing SH, including the importance of leadership, applying an

intersectional approach, and scaling up efforts in the field. UN-Women continues to share good practices and recommendations from these dialogues with the international community, which are summarized in two publications so far ([publication 1](#) and [publication 2](#)). UN-Women will soon create a knowledge hub to foster knowledge sharing, transparency, and efficiency amongst the UN system and external stakeholders (in the summer of 2023).

18. Furthermore, having become a full member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in October 2022, UN-Women joined the IASC PSEA Technical Advisory Group in March 2023. Since then, the organisation has provided technical inputs to all key deliverables, including a mapping exercise of PSEA commitments in cluster guidance and handbooks and its development of an IASC definition and principles of a victim/survivor-centred approach to SEA and SH. UN-Women has continued to do the same as a member of the SEA Working Group. Moreover, UN-Women works closely with the United Nations' Victim's Rights Advocate to advance and implement a victim/survivor-centered approach to SH in the UN system through the Gender Focal Points. Also UN-Women jointly with the President of the General Assembly (PGA) launched a campaign to encourage the staff of the permanent missions to complete the UN training courses on gender equality and on SH prevention, with over 18 missions committing to this effort in the first week.

19. To concretely measure progress in addressing SEA and SH, UN-Women developed a comprehensive indicators and metrics framework, complementing the overall performance measurement through the Strategic Plan PSEA and SH KPI, which will inform the corresponding UN-Women strategies, policies, and procedures from here on forward.

20. In addition, the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan allows the organisation to track progress of countries supported by UN-Women in addressing gaps in action to address SH in multiple settings whether urban, rural, online, workplace, conflict-affected and humanitarian settings.^[1] In 2022, UN-Women expanded work in 34 countries on preventing and responding to sexual violence in public and/or private spaces, with 31 countries focusing on new multi-stakeholder initiatives on SH and adaptations to urban settings in 18 countries. The organisation hopes to see many more countries this year accelerating their efforts to end this global scourge, with increased support to UN-Women in this journey.

III. Improvements of UN-Women's organisational culture to address the underlying causes of SEA and SH

21. UN-Women recognizes that to effectively tackle SEA and SH across the UN, a culture change that challenges individual attitudes, beliefs and practices, and broader social norms around gender and violence, and their systems and structures is vital. For this reason, the organisation has also over the past year been prioritizing the improvement of its organisational culture to address the underlying root causes of SEA and SH, which are present in the UN system and the contexts it works in.

^[1] SP Output: 4e (Number of countries with multistakeholder initiatives in place to prevent and respond to sexual violence including SH in public and/or private spaces.

22. Guided by its commitment to nurturing an empowered workforce and an inclusive culture as one of the five Organisational Effectiveness and Efficiency (OEE) outputs in its 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, UN-Women undertook a set of targeted actions over the past year, strengthening interpersonal and leadership capacities, enhancing safeguarding and well-being, and fostering diversity and inclusion, to promote an ethical, principled, and transformative UN-Women workplace.

23. To equip UN-Women personnel with key capacities to co-create a respectful work environment, the organisation developed an inter-active, scenario-based organisational culture training, which has been piloted in different regions and is being continuously rolled out. An inventory of learning activities and case scenarios was set up as part of this initiative, allowing for the workshop to be adapted and contextualized for the specific circumstances it is held in. Furthermore, UN-Women's micro-learning modules on intersectionality, positive masculinities, and power dynamics also were incorporated into personnel trainings on topics related to workplace relations, thus leveraging already existing capacity building efforts.

24. UN-Women personnel continued to be provided with conflict resolution, mediation and conflict coaching services by the Ombudsman for Funds and Programmes and the HR Workplace Relations Advisor. Furthermore, to build capacity in the workplace on conflict prevention and resolution at country and regional level, UN-Women continued to participate in the "Respectful Workplace Facilitators" (RWFs) programme, under the umbrella of the Ombudsman for Funds & Programs. Moreover, UN-Women also maintained its collaboration with the Office of the Ombudsman through its participation in its Conversation with the Mediator Programme.

25. To promote and protect the mental health and well-being of its personnel, UN-Women continued to make available psycho-social support and stress management to all personnel. This was provided through its three regional in-house staff counsellors, via the regional Critical Incident Stress Management Section (CISMS) Counsellors from the UN Secretariat, as well as the external psychosocial counselling service provider. In multiple country offices, these efforts are complemented through actions by wellbeing teams which were established to spread greater mental health and well-being awareness. In addition, UN-Women personnel were again provided with the opportunity to participate in the Peace on Purpose program, organized by the United Nations Foundation, comprised of a series of mindfulness and wellness webinars to, inter-alia, prevent burnout, build resilience, and calm stress. In April 2023, UN-Women launched its partnership with Headspace, a comprehensive provider of mental health and well-being care, to provide all UN-Women personnel access with science-backed meditation and mindfulness tools to help them create habits that support their mental health and focus.

26. To contribute to a healthy workplace culture and to address the mental health needs of the UN personnel across the UN system, as well as to improve the organisational capacities in this regard, UN-Women is an active member of the UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy Implementation Board.

27. In an effort to further strengthen UN-Women's robust ethics and integrity culture across the organisation, UN-Women established a dedicated in-house Ethics post to lead the ethics function independently, fostering of a robust culture of ethical leadership.

28. Moreover, to ensure that the standards of conduct expected from UN-Women personnel reflect the values of the organisations of the United Nations system and provide a framework for the conduct that meets current needs, UN-Women is participating, together with other UN entities and staff federations, in the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) working group to revise the current Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service.

29. Through the Office of the Focal Point for Women at UN-Women, the organisation further contributes to an enabling, gender-sensitive work environment across the UN system. The network of 475 gender focal points from different UN entities, coordinated by the Office of the Focal Point for Women, implements the recommendations of Enabling Environment Guidelines for the UN System and Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines, in support of gender parity and an inclusive working environment free from any form of harassment. These Guidelines were developed by UN-Women and address the aspect of culture change to address SH through its chapter on Standards of Conduct.

30. Furthermore, UN-Women continued to advance processes that contribute to diversity, inclusion and equality. Understanding that the availability of human resource data is important for diagnosing disparities within different processes as well as the experience of affected or impacted staff members by demographic group, UN-Women's Strategic Plan includes metrics to track the extent to which personnel perceive UN-Women to empower, engage and nurture their workforce in order to strengthen inclusive culture. The global workforce survey, commissioned in 2022, was designed to provide data to inform equity and inclusion action plans across the organisation and included elements specific to the promotion of diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism. To ensure good follow up, regional and division level discussion to accommodate plans will be organized that are actionable and relevant. Continued investment in these action plans is critical as they will support team-based benchmarks, measuring progress towards internal equity and enhancing an inclusive workplace culture.

31. In addition, in recognition of several calls for tangible, concrete, short to long term goal setting, several staff initiatives created the space to raise issues on the experience of staff with respect to discrimination including race. These include: the Staff Council; the Black Caucus, a consortium of Black UN-Women personnel formed to discuss and address specific issues related to race; the global LGBTIQ+ community network; the Youth Council, which creates space for regular engagement on issues of diversity and inclusion, availing UN-Women staff resources from the broader UN system. It provides a critical feedback mechanism for leadership on issues that are important to employees and that affect the efficient functioning of UN-Women.

32. In an effort to build a more supportive and enabling work environment for LGBTIQ+ personnel, UN-Women established in 2020 a LGBTIQ+ Rights Specialist post, who in collaboration with human resources and security personnel, UN-GLOBE, LGBTIQ+ personnel directly, and other interlinked constituencies. This function has been working to address structural issues in practical ways via the provision of necessary supports and systems for LGBTIQ+ personnel. UN-Women is proud to be part of the forthcoming UN system-wide strategy and guidance on protection from violence and discrimination based on SOGIESC, which includes a comprehensive internal focus, and stands ready to support action towards LGBTIQ+ equality from within the UN system.

33. Furthermore, as part of its leadership and team development strategy, in 2022 UN-Women implemented a global 360 feedback survey exercise for 201 senior managers, with an 80% completion rate, followed by executive one-on-one coaching for all participating managers in an effort to strengthen leadership to contribute to the fostering of a more inclusive workplace culture. All managers have received or are now completing their four hours of executive coaching to support them implement identified areas of action to improve their leadership capacity and strengthen the collective development of their team to deliver results through an empowering workplace culture. With that, UN-Women achieved its milestone of 90 per cent of senior managers participating in leadership programmes/initiatives within their first 2 years in position.

34. In addition, in 2022, a pilot number of HQ divisions have co-created team development journeys with managers and their teams that focus on addressing key team and operational or programmatic needs through the application of self-leadership, collective team leadership, co-creation and system change skills and mindsets.

35. Over the past year, as part of institutional commitment to disability inclusion and accessibility, UN-Women provided policy and operational guidance on accessibility audit and reasonable accommodation, and gradually incorporated accessibility features in its locations including at headquarter; this is a growing trend for field locations too. UN-Women has been making progress in the implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion strategy (UNDIS), increasing the number of indicators of the UNDIS accountability framework for which it approaches and those that it meets/exceeds requirements. Additionally, UN-Women promoted collaboration and coordination among United Nations entities to address the intersectionality of gender and disability, convening the first-ever United Nations Interagency Working Group on Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion. The entity encouraged and supported UNCT joint programming and advocacy on disability inclusion by providing policy and knowledge guidance and HelpDesk support to UN-Women offices and their UN and non-UN partners including increased collaboration with the Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). The Action Coalition's guidance and recommendations, and more than 60 commitments in the Commitment Makers Dashboard are disability inclusive.