

UN Executive Boards 2026 - Joint Statement on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

UNICEF

Thank you, Mister/Madam President.

I deliver this statement on behalf of Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, the EU as a donor, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Mexico, Zambia, Türkiye and my own country, the United Kingdom.

We thank UNICEF for its continued efforts to strengthen protection from, and response to, sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment — or SEAH.

As we made clear in Board discussions last year, SEAH prevention and response is a non-optional core accountability commitment, even amid resourcing constraints. Leadership is critical to protect gains and drive further change.

We are at a critical juncture. Across the system financial pressures and staffing reductions are weakening protection systems, limiting prevention efforts and access to survivor support and risking hard-won progress when needs remain high.

The erosion of gender-based violence services is particularly concerning, as these constitute essential entry points for reporting. Underreporting remains a systemic challenge, driven by fear, lack of trust, and perceived inaction.

These challenges are acute for children, who are among the most vulnerable and depend on specialised, child-sensitive approaches. *We would welcome greater clarity on how agencies are ensuring their prevention, response and victim-survivor support approaches are child sensitive.*

The important 2025 JIU Review on SEA underlined the need for dedicated expertise, clear accountability, and sustained resourcing. We urge agencies to protect the good practices that the review identified, fully implement the recommendations, and prioritise sufficient human and financial resources for SEAH prevention and response, particularly at country level – recognising the importance of building country-level capacity and strengthening national safeguarding systems. How will the Agencies report to the Board on implementation of the recommendations of the JIU report and the comprehensive assessment commissioned by the Special Coordinator?

The JIU review rightly highlights that tackling SEAH requires a coherent and consistent system-wide effort. With shrinking resources, collaboration should increase — not diminish. We encourage agencies to strengthen inter-agency collaboration and improve efficiency and impact through mechanisms such as the Common Approach to Protection from SEAH and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme.

UN80 and the humanitarian reset offer a unique opportunity to embed a strengthened, well-resourced, sustainable systemwide approach to protection from SEAH. We urge agencies to work with Member States and each other to influence these reform processes to ensure this happens.

Turning to UNICEF, last year the Board asked management to ensure dedicated, adequate and sustainable staffing, expertise, and funding to tackle SEAH. This year, we are concerned that recent changes to UNICEF's approach may have significant implications for this work.

As UNICEF implements its Future Focus Initiative, protection from SEAH must remain a distinct priority, not diluted within broader safeguarding or risk frameworks. Integrated systems can add value, but are not a substitute for dedicated expertise and capacity.

We are concerned that UNICEF has moved towards a decentralised approach with significant reductions in dedicated roles at headquarters, regional and country levels - removing vital expertise needed to manage SEAH risk in programmes and operations and creating accountability gaps. This is particularly serious given UNICEF's child-focused mandate and the fact that around a third of allegations concerning UNICEF staff or partners involve children.

We ask UNICEF to clarify how current capacity dedicated solely to protection from SEAH compares with pre-cut levels, and what assessment was made of the likely impact of on SEAH risk management, including risks to children. We ask UNICEF to keep protection from SEAH as a visible, well-resourced, operationally grounded priority, and to demonstrate in future reporting how dedicated capacity, accountability and programme reach will be prioritised and sustained.

Safe, accessible and survivor-centred reporting and assistance systems must be maintained as financial pressures increase vulnerability and strain referral pathways and frontline services. How is UNICEF addressing barriers to reporting in practice?

Finally, we encourage UNICEF to continue to play a leadership role in strengthening system-wide approaches, and to follow other agencies and use the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme. Given other agencies have found MDS useful, when will UNICEF pilot the Scheme?

We welcome continued dialogue to support UNICEF's work on PSEAH.

Thank you.