

# **UNICEF Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment**

**January 2019**

**unicef**  | **for every child**

# Contents

- 1. BACKGROUND ..... 2
  - 1.1 Introduction..... 2
  - 1.2 Purpose and Scope ..... 2
- 2. VISION..... 3
  - 2.1 Vision ..... 3
  - 2.2 Goals ..... 3
  - 2.3 Principles ..... 3
  - 2.4 Values ..... 4
- 3. STRATEGIC FOCUS ..... 4
  - 3.1 An Organisational Culture of zero tolerance built through Accountability, Prevention and Gender Equality..... 4
  - 3.2 Reporting Mechanisms that are Safe and Trusted ..... 5
  - 3.3 Investigations and Sanctions that are Swift and Credible ..... 6
  - 3.4 A Quality Response that is Survivor-Centred ..... 6
  - 3.5 Engaging Partners in the fight against SEA and SH..... 6
- 4. OPERATIONALISATION ..... 7
  - 4.1 Leaders as Champions ..... 7
  - 4.2 Internal and External Coordination and Collaboration ..... 7
  - 4.3 Communication ..... 7
  - 4.4 Normative and Regulatory instruments ..... 7
  
- ANNEX ONE: Definitions ..... 8

## 1. BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) are unacceptable breaches of fundamental human rights and a deep betrayal of UNICEF's core values. The sexual exploitation and abuse of those who depend on UNICEF for assistance runs counter to all our personal and organisational values. It is unconscionable, it is intolerable, and it is often criminal. Equally intolerable is the sexual harassment of our fellow aid workers.

Working closely with partners and communities, UNICEF has significantly stepped up its fight against SEA and SH. This work is informed by, and taking place in tandem with, the work of related actors including the broader UN system, donors, and civil society organizations.

In 2018, an independent review of UNICEF's response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and an independent review of how the organization has dealt with claims of sexual harassment in the workplace were completed. Both reviews have delivered a comprehensive set of recommendations which are being addressed in line with this strategy. In addition, an Independent Task Force of external and internal advisors on Workplace Gender Discrimination & Harassment was established in 2018 to review current practices and provide recommendations to effectively and systematically prevent and address workplace gender-related discrimination, harassment and abuse of power. The work of the taskforce is ongoing and its recommendations will further inform implementation of this strategy.

The UNICEF Executive Director has assumed the role of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Champion for the prevention of SEA and SH for a one-year period. As part of this role, she has led the development and adoption of an IASC Champions Strategy on the protection from and response to SEA and Sexual Harassment, to which this strategy is also closely aligned.

### 1.2 Purpose and Scope

This document presents UNICEF's vision for preventing and responding to both SEA and SH and sets out concrete strategies and interventions for creating and maintaining a safe and respectful environment for the people UNICEF serves and for UNICEF staff and related personnel. This includes UNICEF staff members, consultants, individual contractors, volunteers, interns, experts on mission, individuals serving on loan to UNICEF, or persons working for UNICEF through an employment agency (hereafter referred to as UNICEF personnel).

Protections against SEA and SH target two different but related areas:

- **SEA** is the abuse or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes or the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature by UN personnel, their implementing partners or other aid workers, against the people they serve.
- **SH** is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment by UN personnel against each other, or against any other individual.

The UN has adopted standard definitions for SEA and SH which are provided in Annex 1.

Recognising the difference between the two, this Strategy covers both SEA and SH, bringing them together in a way that is mutually reinforcing and that creates opportunities to leverage practices between the two.

The Strategy also acknowledges the complexity and limitation to UNICEF's authority in relation to SEA perpetrated by implementing partner personnel, including Government personnel. However, it does include measures to address and prevent these violations including supporting partners to fully integrate PSEA into national programmes in both development and humanitarian contexts, creating a joined-up accountability culture that abhors, sanctions and prevents SEA and protects victims.

## 2. VISION

### 2.1 Vision

Realising the right of individuals and communities that UNICEF and its partners serve to access the protection and assistance they need without fear of sexual exploitation and abuse; the right of UNICEF staff members and related personnel to feel supported, respected and empowered to deliver assistance in an environment free from sexual harassment; and the right of survivors of SEA and SH to access timely and confidential investigation and effective and safe assistance and support.

### 2.2 Goals

- a) **An Organisational Culture of zero tolerance:** Create and nurture an organisational culture based on Accountability where there is a zero tolerance for SEA and SH, where rights are recognized, promoted and protected and where violations are actively prevented.
- b) **Reporting mechanisms that are safe and trusted:** Empower and support individuals, communities, UNICEF personnel and partners to feel safe to report violations and to feel safe that reports will be handled in a manner that respects due process and other human rights.
- c) **Swift and Credible Investigation and Sanctions:** Ensure a fair process for swift and credible investigations and sanctions for violations by UNICEF personnel, and actively promote swift and fair investigations and sanctions by (as appropriate) Government partners, implementing partners, commercial vendors, and other UN System organizations.
- d) **Survivor-Centred Response:** Provide survivor-centred assistance and support that is timely, predictable, sustainable and adequately resourced.
- e) **Engaging Partners in the fight against SEA and SH:** Engage and equip individuals, communities, UNICEF personnel and implementing partners as allies in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

### 2.3 Principles

The following principles underpin and inform UNICEF's strategy:

- The children, women, men and communities that UNICEF serves have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and to receive assistance without threat of exploitation and abuse;
- UNICEF has zero tolerance for SEA and SH. As such, it has a responsibility to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and a responsibility to provide timely, confidential, and effective investigation, assistance and support to survivors;
- All UNICEF personnel have the right to work in an environment free from sexual harassment;

- All UNICEF personnel are expected to act with tolerance, sensitivity and respect for diversity. They have the obligation to ensure that they do not engage in, condone or tolerate behaviour that would constitute sexual harassment.

## 2.4 Values

UNICEF's core values are central to how it prevents and responds to SEA and SH:

- **Care:** The children, women, men and communities that UNICEF serves, and those who serve them, will be treated with care, sensitivity and dignity;
- **Respect:** All UNICEF personnel are expected to act with respect and tolerance;
- **Integrity:** All UNICEF personnel demonstrate integrity through honest, principled, fair, and ethical behaviour;
- **Trust:** UNICEF and its personnel will demonstrate and inspire integrity, ability and confidence among communities, partners and between each other.
- **Accountability:** UNICEF and its personnel have an obligation to account for organisational and personal behaviour and accept responsibility for their conduct in a transparent manner.

## 3. STRATEGIC FOCUS

### 3.1 An Organisational Culture of zero tolerance built through Accountability, Prevention and Gender Equality

#### a) Accountability

UNICEF will use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people it seeks to assist. This accountability will drive all UNICEF actions on SEA and SH and will operate on three levels:

- **Individual Accountability:** All UNICEF personnel are accountable for regulating their conduct at all times in a manner befitting their status as international civil servants, including in their private lives when not at work. They are expected to support an organisational culture of care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability that deters violations.
- **Leadership Accountability:** The Executive Director together with Senior Management are accountable for setting the tone from the top and guiding the organisation in preventing and responding to SEA and SH in all contexts. They will prioritise the resourcing of programmes, teams and structures to enable effective prevention and response measures to be rolled out. They will lead in creating an organisational culture of zero tolerance based on care, respect, integrity, trust and accountability.
- **Organisational Accountability:** UNICEF as an organisation is accountable to act on complaints – that is, to provide support to survivors; to conduct impartial and confidential investigations; to apply sanctions within the scope of UNICEF's authority; to cooperate with national legal systems as appropriate so as to help secure fair recourse. While the accountability for violations by personnel of implementing partners rests with those entities, UNICEF has an organisational accountability to work closely with implementing partners to manage shared risks, address common challenges.

## **b) Prevention and Deterrence**

UNICEF will continue to strengthen an organisational culture of prevention and deterrence. This will start at the top, where prevention is to be actively promoted through openness, where speaking up and speaking out are encouraged, where difficult discussions are facilitated, and where zero tolerance is demonstrated through consistent and sustained actions, including an active demonstration of UNICEF's core values, starting with UNICEF leadership.

As a measure to strengthen prevention, PSEA and SH will be included as core elements of the organisation's enterprise risk management approach. Every office will be required to identify SEA and SH risks and to define and implement mitigation measures as part of their risk management plans. The preparation of new country, regional and global programmes and strategies will systematically include an analysis of SEA and SH risks and identification of risk drivers. Risk management measures for SEA and SH may differ significantly given the different scope of applicability, and related reporting and response. All the measures will be clearly articulated in any risk management plans.

## **c) Gender Equality**

Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment become possible when there are imbalances of power and opportunities for exploiting such imbalances.

In many of the contexts where UNICEF works, there is a deep imbalance of power based on gender - some are more likely to have control of resources, and others are more likely to be dependent on those for their access to resources and services.

Through its Gender Action Plan 2018-2021, UNICEF is promoting gender equality across the organization's work including the gender dimensions of its programmatic results, as well as the steps to strengthen gender across change strategies and institutional systems and processes.

Gender inequality in the UNICEF workplace contributes to sexual harassment and sex discrimination. Addressing the imbalance of power requires both individual and systemic change. An organisational culture conducive to such change will be key. Building on efforts to date, including obtaining EDGE ("the Economic Dividends of Gender Equality") certification, UNICEF will continue to invest in individual understanding, capability, and commitment, and in changing organisational norms and structural policies that act as barriers to achieving equality. These efforts will be conducted in an inclusive and collaborative manner.

### **3.2 Reporting Mechanisms that are Safe and Trusted**

Recognising that reporting procedures in cases of SEA and SH are very different, UNICEF will create an environment where, in both situations, individuals, communities, UNICEF personnel and partners feel safe to report violations and trust that immediate and decisive action will be taken against perpetrators.

In cases of SEA, complaint mechanisms will be safe, gender-sensitive, and appropriate to the context. They will be developed in consultation with affected communities, particularly those most vulnerable, and linked to services for survivors. An SEA risk assessment and a contextualized needs assessment will inform the development of new complaint channels and reinforce existing channels.

In cases of SH (only), UNICEF will implement, as a minimum, the standards reflected in the CEB Model Policy on Sexual Harassment and in keeping with its Duty of Care to its personnel. Informal resolution efforts will continue to be an option (but not obligation); they will not preclude formal reporting.

Confidentiality interests and the interests of survivors will be considered before and during all cases. Anonymous complaints will be accepted through multiple channels. Deadlines will not be imposed. Protections from retaliation will be offered. A dedicated OIAI case manager will assist in keeping parties appropriately updated on the process and informed of available support.

For both SEA and SH, the Executive Director and Senior Management will actively promote and reinforce a ‘speak up, speak out’ culture and actively engage in understanding the attitudes, cultures and power dynamics that drive under-reporting.

### **3.3 Investigations and Sanctions that are Swift and Credible**

UNICEF’s investigation function will be strengthened to ensure timely, impartial, independent and fair investigations for SEA and SH. UNICEF will take all measures to build trust for its investigation function, including, where appropriate, engaging independent third-parties with experience in the global workplace to receive reports of sexual harassment through channels appropriate for various locations and to conduct investigations within the framework and authority of UNICEF’s overall investigative function.

Perpetrators will be held accountable for their actions. UNICEF will take appropriate action against those who choose not to respect our standards of conduct, including the systematic use of sanctions as a means of addressing impunity.

The Executive Director will engage with other heads of Agencies and with the Special Coordinator in a collective effort to strengthen sanctions with due respect to feasibility, legality, due process rights of alleged perpetrators, and effectiveness of such sanctions. Communication and awareness raising among partners and UNICEF personnel on the consequences of violations will be integrated into internal and external communication strategies as a key deterrent measure.

### **3.4 A Quality Response that is Survivor-Centred**

UNICEF is committed to ensuring every child and adult survivor of SEA and SH has access to quality, survivor-centered assistance and support in line with their needs, including medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and reintegration support.

For SEA, a UN Victim Assistance protocol will contribute to guiding the consistent delivery of this assistance. UNICEF supports the role of UN Victims’ Rights Advocates to promote and ensure the rights of victims of SEA committed under the UN banner, and advocate for a victim-centered approach across the UN system. UNICEF is a proponent of the Voluntary Compact and Circle of Leadership, which are Secretary-General initiatives with Member States to prevent, respond, and be accountable for SEA. UNICEF will continue to work with the UN for transparency and accountability, including legal recourse for SEA.

For SH, UNICEF is equally committed to providing comprehensive support and assistance to staff who experience sexual harassment including confidential ethical advice and guidance; protection from retaliation; counselling; mediation or alternative dispute resolution; medical services; and security support.

### **3.5 Engaging Partners in the fight against SEA and SH**

Individuals, communities, staff and partners, including Government partners, will be engaged more directly and better equipped as allies in prevention & response.

For PSEA, community outreach, consultation, mobilization and awareness raising in communities that receive UNICEF assistance, particularly in high-risk environments, will be integrated into existing community consultation approaches as a trust building and prevention measure. This includes the sharing of PSEA principles and codes of conduct (including what will be done in response to any complaint) in accessible formats (simplified texts, picture messages, audio recordings, graphics or videos) and languages and dissemination through multiple channels.

In programme countries, UNICEF is committed to the pursuit of a shared culture of zero tolerance that binds all UN and implementing partner personnel. Working with other UN agencies, UNICEF will continue to support Governments to strengthen national capacities and systems to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

## **4. OPERATIONALISATION**

### **4.1 Leaders as Champions**

UNICEF leadership, from the Executive Director through Senior Management at headquarters, regions and in country offices, will be equipped to champion prevention, an organisational culture of trust, and workplace practices that reinforce individual and organisational accountability. Leadership and management practices in UNICEF will be grounded in the code of conduct.

### **4.2 Internal and External Coordination and Collaboration**

Successful implementation of the Strategy relies on strong coordination and cooperation at various levels: i) across all parts of UNICEF in all locations; ii) between UNICEF and other UN agencies; and iii) in the field between country offices, UNCTs and RC Offices.

A newly appointed PSEA & Sexual Harassment Coordinator in the Office of the Executive Director will lead in coordinating a whole of organisation approach to PSEA and SH with a focus on ensuring coherence and synergies both internally and with external partners. This will involve bringing together the expertise and accountabilities of multiple divisions and offices in UNICEF, establishing effective coordination and monitoring mechanisms, and facilitating dialogue and information exchange.

On interagency coordination, UNICEF will continue to play a lead role in the PSEA Networks and systems at field level, and the UN SEA working Group and IASC AAP and PSEA Task team at global level. The Executive Director, in her role as Champion for PSEA and Sexual Harassment, will ensure full alignment of UNICEF efforts with those of the broader UN system as well as influence the UN system for the protection of children and women.

### **4.3 Communication**

Clear, timely and open communication is a key enabler of this strategy. A dedicated and tailored internal and external communication strategy will frame communication efforts. The strategy will take account of the various contexts in which UNICEF operates and support Country Offices and staff with PSEA and SH communications in those contexts.

### **4.4 Normative and Regulatory instruments**

UNICEF will establish clear and accessible normative and regulatory instruments that will guide the operationalisation of this Strategy. These will include a coherent and complementary set of policies and procedures; an accountability framework that sets out roles and responsibilities at every level; a monitoring and evaluation framework with tangible benchmarks for measuring progress on implementation of the strategy; and a resourcing and capacity building strategy without which progress will not be possible.



The following definitions have been adopted by the United Nations System and are common across all United Nations System organizations:

- a) **Sexual Exploitation:** any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.<sup>1</sup>
- b) **Sexual abuse:** the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.<sup>2</sup>
- c) **Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offense or humiliation, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Sexual harassment may occur in the workplace or in connection with work. While typically involving a pattern of conduct, sexual harassment may take the form of a single incident. In assessing the reasonableness of expectations or perceptions, the perspective of the person who is the target of the conduct shall be considered.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Secretary-General's Bulletin, Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, ST/SGB/2003/13, 9 October 2003, Page 1

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> 2018, CEB Model Policy on Sexual Harassment, CEB/2018/HLCM/14/Add.1, Page 13