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**Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a
zero-tolerance policy**

**Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the
United Nations peacekeeping operations**

Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [71/278](#), [71/297](#), [72/312](#), [73/302](#), [75/321](#), [76/274](#) and [77/333](#). It contains updates on measures taken by the United Nations to strengthen the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.



I. Introduction

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse is rooted in power imbalances, often linked to inequality, notably gender inequality. It has been a challenge for the United Nations for many years, and victims continue to experience its consequences. As we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Secretary-General's bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([ST/SGB/2003/13](#)), issued in 2003, I am compelled to reflect on our journey to address this critical issue within the United Nations.

2. The Secretary-General's bulletin established standards of conduct applicable to all staff members of the United Nations, including staff members of separately administered organs and programmes of United Nations system organizations. Two years later, the report entitled "A comprehensive strategy to eliminate future sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping operations (also known as the "Zeid report")" (see [A/59/710](#)) recommended reforms, for both the United Nations Secretariat and Member States, to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping operations. In particular, it was recommended that all civilian and uniformed personnel appointed or contracted by the United Nations be bound by the standards set out in the bulletin (see [A/59/710](#), paras. 23–25). In 2005, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations of the General Assembly recommended that the General Assembly endorse the standards of conduct and behaviour in the bulletin "for all categories of United Nations peacekeeping personnel" (see [A/59/19/Rev.1](#)). The General Assembly endorsed this recommendation in its resolution [59/300](#). Since then, the standards set forth in the bulletin have been incorporated into the legal instruments applicable to the other categories of United Nations personnel.

3. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse continued, and an independent review of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by international forces under a United Nations mandate in the Central African Republic ([A/71/99](#)),¹ conducted in 2016, found that the allegations were indicative of a systemic problem and coordination failures. In response, I launched a new and proactive strategy in 2017 to improve the Organization's system-wide approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (the "new approach" set out in [A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)).

4. We have made progress since 2017 through the establishment of frameworks, policies and procedures. However, seven years later, I am deeply concerned that sexual exploitation and abuse continues to occur across the United Nations system, not just in peacekeeping settings but also in humanitarian and development contexts.

5. Regrettably, some perpetrators of this conduct are the very people deployed to protect at-risk individuals and communities and prevent harm. Sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations personnel is a betrayal of the trust placed in us by the communities we serve. It can only continue in an environment that allows it to. I am convinced that with determination, resolve and commitment, this scourge can be eliminated.

6. It is time for a cultural transformation within the United Nations. The new approach of 2017 identified prevention as a prerequisite for success. However, based on lessons learned from the last two decades, 2024 must see the start of robust transformation in all aspects of our operations and resource allocations, with a focus on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and promoting a "speak-up" culture within the Organization.

¹ The report was focused on forces operating under authorization of the Security Council but not under United Nations command.

II. Progress, lessons learned and persistent challenges in the system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse

7. Extensive field visits conducted over the past year by my Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, in collaboration with United Nations agencies and entities, have provided a clear picture of the state of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse implementation across the United Nations system, especially at field level. The Special Coordinator engaged with a wide range of stakeholders – including leadership, United Nations country teams, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse networks, civil society organizations, United Nations personnel, troops, police and local communities – in peacekeeping, humanitarian and development contexts. He also visited several troop- and police-contributing countries. It became evident through this engagement that there had been some improvement in terms of reporting, the harmonization of standards, transparency, collective accountability and the conduct of investigations.

8. These findings were substantiated by the results of the eighth annual survey to assess the understanding of United Nations staff regarding protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, conducted in 2023. Over 50,000 staff from 94 entities and 168 countries or territories participated in the exercise. The results show a high degree of basic awareness of rules and responsibilities, including the responsibility to report incidents of wrongdoing. According to the survey, around 90 per cent of responding staff had completed predeployment training during the preceding year, with 40 per cent having received induction training and 61 per cent having received refresher training. Virtually all respondents attributed an improved awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse to their training.

9. The field visits and survey results also reveal that there are many challenges which need to be addressed. While a number of areas of progress have been identified, some other areas will continue to need attention, including the lack of predictable and sustainable funding for work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the inconsistent approach to protection efforts across our operations and programmes. Other systemic challenges include the need for safe and confidential reporting channels, for enhanced technical capacity among staff, such as the focal points for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and for strengthened training for personnel, particularly on how to report sexual exploitation and abuse. Thorough and accountable investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse and post-investigation disciplinary processes can take time, and a lack of adequate resources results in further delays, while the provision of support to victims remains inadequate and unpredictable. These issues exist in all settings, though peacekeeping and humanitarian contexts pose higher sexual exploitation and abuse risks. As a result, sexual exploitation and abuse continues to be a critical challenge, undermining the very essence of our mission and posing an existential threat to the principles we uphold.

III. Prevention

10. Our strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse must be anchored in prevention. This includes screening, training, awareness-raising and risk assessments, along with other activities. Screening through the ClearCheck system to ensure that known perpetrators are not hired plays an important role in reducing the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. Updated information and data on ClearCheck can be found at <https://unsceb.org/screening-database-clearcheck>.

11. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has strengthened its recruitment screening by piloting its participation in the

Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, as a complement to its use of ClearCheck, and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) will pilot its participation in the scheme in early 2024. The Misconduct Disclosure Scheme is currently used by more than 230 organizations, 65 of which joined in 2023. The majority of participants are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations and, increasingly, private sector organizations. More than 86,000 checks have been conducted through the scheme since 2019, resulting in 230 applications being rejected. The scheme is also being promoted at the country level in emergency and refugee settings. In accordance with General Assembly resolution [77/278](#), the Secretariat is exploring “whether the ClearCheck database and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme can complement each other”. We are also exploring enhanced screening and information exchange with other mechanisms to improve screening and deter the recruitment of past sexual exploitation and abuse offenders.

12. The Secretariat is finalizing improvements to its risk management tools, including guidance for peace operations, based on lessons learned. This guidance is aimed at promoting an integrated approach to conducting risk assessments across field missions and United Nations country teams, using data and trend analysis for targeted, location-specific actions. These updates will be implemented in 2024. A flexible risk assessment tool has been developed and is being tested for field use, both online and offline, to create a more consistent approach to monitoring in follow-up risk assessment visits.

13. We are enhancing our current training programmes on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The mandatory e-learning course for all Secretariat personnel, launched in 2016, has been updated and translated into all of the official languages of the United Nations. The updated version was released in February 2023. The Secretariat is in the process of reviewing and updating the chapter on sexual exploitation and abuse in the core predeployment training materials provided to Member States for personnel serving in peace operations. A number of agencies have been improving their training and advocacy concerning protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. For instance, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) has introduced participatory and scenario-based elements, and also new microlearning modules on power dynamics, intersectionality and positive masculinities. Some agencies have reported an increase in participants’ confidence to report sexual exploitation and abuse and an empowerment to challenge behaviour. The World Food Programme (WFP) launched training packages on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for country directors and deputy country directors in 2023 and aims to roll these out further in 2024.

14. We are also strengthening our engagement with communities as a key part of our prevention efforts. The “Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse at the Frontline – Together We Say No” tools are aimed at raising awareness among drivers, contractors, financial service providers, small NGO partners and others and are available in 22 languages. WFP and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are currently developing a multilingual multimedia package of accessible information on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for beneficiaries. Community feedback is used to develop risk mitigation measures, strengthen responses and tailor training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for staff and partners. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is using its electronic messaging and polling platform, U-Report, to consult with communities in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti about their knowledge of misconduct and reporting channels and their preferred reporting methods, and to disseminate key messages on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is extending its outreach to communities to raise awareness.

15. Strong and consistent leadership at all levels is critical in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and demonstrating that misconduct is addressed. In 2023, the Secretariat piloted the reinforcement training package for uniformed commanders, in cooperation with several Member States. It provides targeted training support for commanders on conduct and discipline, with a focus on the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse. The package has been translated into the six official languages of the United Nations and will be rolled out in 2024. My Special Coordinator has provided support to prevention efforts, spoken at training sessions and participated in 15 town halls, and he continues to engage with leadership and personnel to bolster awareness of standards and stress the importance of preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.

IV. Institutionalizing protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

16. The approval of the General Assembly of my proposal to finance the position of a Special Coordinator at the Under-Secretary-General level under the Organization's regular budget signifies our strong commitment to advancing the institutionalization of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system. Throughout his interactions with stakeholders, the Special Coordinator has emphasized the need for coherent standards and policies, consistent enforcement, dedicated and sustained resources and the integration of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse measures throughout United Nations operations. He also gathered insights and feedback from personnel on key challenges, such as the need to evaluate the current fragmented approach to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and to consider a more unified strategy for institutionalizing protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

17. Many United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have introduced or updated strategies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and strengthened their policies, procedures and monitoring frameworks, as part of their efforts to institutionalize safeguarding against all forms of sexual misconduct. The new UNICEF safeguarding policy, adopted in 2023, embeds sexual exploitation and abuse indicators in country programme monitoring and reporting, in order to strengthen its systems and those of its partners. UNICEF, in association with local communities, has increased eightfold the number of children and adults who have access to sexual exploitation and abuse complaint and reporting mechanisms since 2017.

18. UNICEF has also updated its emergency procedures, funding allocations and provision of technical capacity, in order to better integrate protection from sexual exploitation and abuse throughout all stages of the response. The ongoing development of inter-agency planning, guidance and coordination tools by UNHCR will promote the integration of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in refugee response plans in emergencies and development contexts. Standardized wording on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse has been developed by an inter-agency working group led by UNICEF for inclusion in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and is due to be rolled out in 2024. UNDP has updated its legal instruments to include partner compliance on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. It has also produced new guidelines on assessment of partners for all programme managers and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment focal points.

19. The deployment of personnel to sustained and dedicated posts related to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including the progress towards the appointment of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators in 13 of

the 15 highest-risk locations, integrates protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in the Organization and enables a targeted response appropriate to localized contexts. In 2023, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) funded temporary positions for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators in eight priority locations, on behalf of the United Nations system, and prescreened 38 protection from sexual exploitation and abuse experts, who are rostered for future deployment. The World Health Organization (WHO) funded, through a transfer of funds to UNFPA, two Inter-Agency Standing Committee coordinators. The Development Coordination Office has recruited a regional coordinator for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for Asia and the Pacific, in addition to global and regional focal points who support resident coordinators and country teams. IOM has increased its number of full-time, dedicated protection from sexual exploitation and abuse staff from 11 in 4 countries to 73 in 49 countries. Seventy per cent of UNICEF country offices operating with humanitarian response plans or similar and all its regional offices have dedicated specialists in protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. UNDP and UNFPA have appointed focal points for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in all country offices.

20. WHO has allocated \$50 million of core funding in its 2024–2025 programme budget to create dedicated structures for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, including regional coordinators in all six of its regional offices and 15 technical officers in priority countries, supported by a global network of 407 full- and part-time personnel in WHO country offices. It also requires mandatory annual sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment risk assessments in all 155 country offices and has integrated prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment actions in all graded health emergencies. The enhancement of the capacity of WHO through a fully funded infrastructure for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is a recognition of the fact that protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is part of the cost of doing business. A similar approach should be considered by other agencies.

21. While the above paragraphs indicate that some progress is being made, the lack of adequate and sustained resources for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse continues to impede the effective implementation of such protection across the United Nations system, particularly at the field level. This is starkly illustrated by a two-thirds budget shortfall in a two-year appeal to fund critical protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordination posts in the 15 highest risk countries. Yet the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse has increased significantly during the past year, in proportion to an unprecedented rise in humanitarian crises around the world, underlining the necessity of urgently recalibrating our approach to funding for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

V. Accountability across the United Nations system

22. Sexual exploitation and abuse will not be eradicated from the aid sector until all leaders and individuals, both uniformed and civilian, understand the consequences of such misconduct and potential perpetrators are aware that they will be held accountable. All stakeholders – the United Nations system, Member States, civil society and implementing partners – share the responsibility to ensure that this happens. All entities must have clear and robust policies, processes and procedures in place to respond swiftly to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. They must ensure transparency by making information on allegations and actions taken against perpetrators accessible. We are committed to strengthening accountability and transparency, both at Headquarters and in field operations. I call upon all stakeholders operating under or in association with the United Nations flag to do the same.

A. Leadership responsibility

23. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the response to sexual exploitation and abuse. Leaders and managers at all levels must ensure an inclusive, harmonious and respectful environment, and they must foster a culture of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and for not taking appropriate action in response to sexual exploitation and abuse. They must empower victims and others to speak out, without fear of reprisals, as part of a strong safeguarding culture in which personnel and communities feel safe and are able to raise concerns. These and other measures should be codified as standard operating procedures and enforced. I call upon all leaders across the United Nations system and Member States to be vigilant, exercise oversight of their personnel and ensure clear and effective ongoing communication about the expected standards of conduct and the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse.

24. To this end, the personal responsibility of leaders is monitored through sexual exploitation and abuse leadership compacts and the requirement that heads of United Nations entities at Headquarters and in the field submit annual management letters and action plans. Moreover, leaders confirm in management letters or certify as part of their compacts that all allegations received have been reported and addressed. Action plans are reviewed by the Office of the Special Coordinator, on my behalf, to verify that sexual exploitation and abuse risk mitigation planning is in place. The plans indicate that all entities have: a policy on the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse and workplans to implement the policy; complaint and reporting mechanisms; and mandatory training to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

25. Various initiatives are under way to support leadership and strengthen leadership accountability across the system. All new resident and humanitarian coordinators receive mandatory briefings on their responsibilities with respect to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, from my Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate, emphasizing their accountability for creating a framework to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition, in 2023, the global meeting of resident and humanitarian coordinators had a dedicated plenary discussion with the Victims' Rights Advocate and the Special Coordinator.

26. The terms of reference for all humanitarian coordinators have been updated to reflect leadership imperatives on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. UN-Women performs an annual protection from sexual exploitation and abuse management certification exercise for all its regional directors and country representatives to ensure organization-wide compliance with leadership obligations detailed in Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2003/13](#). Agencies including UNFPA, UNDP and UN-Women have introduced mandatory indicators on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in their strategic plans and integrated results and resource frameworks, to ensure that protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is integrated into their management and monitoring mechanisms. The WHO sexual misconduct accountability framework strengthens the end-to-end sexual misconduct incident management system and requires all members of senior and executive leadership to certify annually that they have delivered on individual accountabilities.

27. My Special Coordinator is in the process of developing a practical toolkit to assist senior leaders in establishing and administering effective protection from sexual exploitation and abuse programmes and responding appropriately to allegations. This follows consultations conducted in 2023 which identified specific challenges that leaders face and need to overcome.

28. These initiatives are aimed at educating leaders as to their responsibilities concerning their staff, and underscore that sexual exploitation and abuse will not be

tolerated and that perpetrators will be held to account. To strengthen leadership accountability, the responsibility to report and act against sexual exploitation and abuse must be specifically mentioned in performance agreements and evaluations. Leadership must lead in breaking the culture of silence surrounding sexual exploitation and abuse. Leaders must also take appropriate actions to prevent and respond to allegations and reports of sexual exploitation and abuse.

B. No impunity

29. The Organization is committed to ending impunity at all levels. This requires strengthened measures in terms of reporting, investigations and follow-up to hold responsible individuals to account. We have made some progress since 2017, including enhancing reporting mechanisms and improving awareness among personnel.

30. However, underreporting remains a major impediment to addressing impunity. In the latest annual survey,² while 6,400 respondents indicated having knowledge of instances where United Nations staff and related personnel or personnel of implementing partners, vendors or suppliers had or may have engaged in transactional sex or committed other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse during the preceding year, only 1,105 (17.3 per cent) had reported them. Fear of retaliation³ and a lack of awareness of reporting obligations and mechanisms remain significant barriers to reporting. There are perceptions that the reporting or investigation of incidents is being discouraged and that action is often not taken. The stigma associated with sexual exploitation and abuse in many communities may also contribute to underreporting. The Organization is addressing these concerns by strengthening outreach to communities, implementing bystander training and enhancing reporting channels. The electronic incident reporting form is intended to simplify, streamline and improve the overall reporting experience, while preserving a confidential workflow system. There have been delays in implementation of the tool, but we are committed to rolling it out in 2024.

31. In 2023, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) opened 130 investigations into complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse,⁴ 30 of which were being investigated jointly with national investigation officers from the respective troop- and police-contributing countries. The 39 investigations into 40 allegations involving WHO staff members and associated personnel were completed.⁵

32. At the country level, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse networks and Association CHS Alliance are supporting investigation capacity-building among partners, and pools of trained investigators are being established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Moldova and Poland, among others. An expert panel was established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to make recommendations on improving victim-centred investigations.

33. Thorough and accountable investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse can take time. To ensure that this does not result in a perception that perpetrators have impunity, the investigation of sexual exploitation and abuse complaints will remain a priority. However, a surging number of reports of sexual misconduct has stretched OIOS resources and, consequently, hampered its ability to complete investigations

² Approximately 52,000 staff responded to the annual survey on facts and perceptions of United Nations personnel related to the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse.

³ A total of 13.3 per cent of staff indicated that they would fear retaliation.

⁴ For comparison, 85 investigations were opened in 2022.

⁵ From the report of the independent commission on the review of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the tenth Ebola virus disease epidemic in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

within expected time frames. OIOS received 162 reports of sexual exploitation and abuse in 2023, an increase of 65 per cent from the 98 reports received in 2019. The overall increase in reports of all types of misconduct received by OIOS was 28 per cent during the same period. The Office's investigation resources have not increased in line with these rising demands. Requests for additional resources are being prepared for approval by Member States, to ensure that OIOS is able to deliver on its core mandate and to enable the Organization to hold its staff members accountable.

34. The Organization is committed to holding accountable perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse, those who shield them and those who otherwise do not act on allegations. In June 2023, the Secretariat repatriated a unit of 60 peacekeepers owing to credible evidence of widespread and systemic sexual exploitation and abuse by 11 members of the unit in the Central African Republic, in accordance with Security Council resolution [2272 \(2016\)](#). In response to allegations of serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the Secretariat repatriated nine members and one senior military officer of a contingent implicated in the incident and requested the replacement of two senior military officers.

35. Regarding the internal justice system of the United Nations, I am concerned that recent judgments of the United Nations Appeals Tribunal have discounted investigation reports by OIOS, including attached sworn witness statements, unless the victims and witnesses testified. In many cases, victims and witnesses are located far from the tribunals, may be unable or unwilling to testify for various reasons and, unless they are United Nations staff members, cannot be compelled to do so. The General Assembly has responded to my concerns by approving an amendment to the statute of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal, confirming that the Dispute Tribunal, in hearing an application to appeal an administrative decision imposing a disciplinary measure, is to conduct a judicial review, in which it shall consider the record assembled by the Secretary-General (see resolution [78/248](#)). My Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate will continue their analysis of how impunity is addressed and how victims' rights are upheld in proceedings of the internal justice system. They will also continue to engage with the Office of Administration of Justice and United Nations judges to broaden the judges' exposure to the context in the field, and in particular to the perspectives of victims.

C. Facilitating accountability at the national level

36. All acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, irrespective of whether they meet the definition of crimes at the national level, violate the values and standards of conduct of the United Nations. The Organization, as an employer, uses its administrative and disciplinary mechanisms to sanction staff members who have engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse. Where acts of sexual exploitation and abuse may amount to crimes, the United Nations refers credible allegations to the State of nationality of the individual concerned and cooperates with national investigations and prosecutions to facilitate the proper administration of justice. This is without prejudice to the rights of any victim or witness to report allegations of criminal acts of sexual exploitation and abuse to national authorities at any time.

37. Between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2023, 28 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against United Nations officials and experts on mission were referred to their States of nationality. The Secretariat provides information received from

Member States on the status of investigations and prosecutions in the annual report on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission.⁶

38. I strongly urge Member States to ensure that United Nations personnel who may have engaged in any form of criminal conduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, are held accountable, and reiterate that the Organization is committed to cooperating with national authorities in this regard. I also call upon Member States to inform the United Nations of the outcome of cases which are referred to them, as urged by the General Assembly (see resolution [77/98](#)).

39. Troop-contributing countries retain the primary authority to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against their military personnel and the exclusive authority to hold their personnel accountable. Lack of visible action by Member States results in impunity for perpetrators and denies justice to victims. I look forward to Member States improving engagement with OIOS by agreeing to conduct joint investigations to ensure more rapid investigations and resolute follow-up. Appropriate accountability measures applicable for sexual exploitation and abuse cases involving uniformed personnel depend on applicable national laws and procedures and, unfortunately, in many instances they remain insufficiently robust to deter would-be perpetrators. Information on allegations concerning members of national military contingents in United Nations peace operations is available on the Conduct in United Nations field missions web page.⁷

40. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate are referred by OHCHR to the Member State concerned for investigation, prosecution and provision of remedies for victims. Despite regular exchanges with States of nationality of alleged perpetrators, limited information has been provided to the Organization. OHCHR has not received information on national proceedings leading to sanctions for perpetrators or remedies for victims. I encourage Member States and regional organizations to engage proactively with OHCHR in conducting timely and independent investigations and facilitating victims' access to justice and redress.

41. I am grateful to the 37 Member States that have provided information on the extent to which they have prohibited acts amounting to sexual exploitation and abuse relating to their uniformed personnel in their national legislation and ensured that the sanctions available are commensurate with the gravity of the acts, as requested in my two previous reports ([A/76/702](#), paras. 41 and 43, and [A/77/748](#), para. 44). In 2024, Member States contributing uniformed personnel to peace operations will be asked to certify that their national legislation ensures the imposition of such sanctions. This will be an additional element to the existing certification that troop- and police-contributing countries provide to the Secretariat on conduct and discipline, including sexual exploitation and abuse. The Secretariat will continue to work with Member States to identify and disseminate good practices in national legislation and strengthen mechanisms to hold perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse crimes to account.

42. In summary, accountability at the national level continues to be a challenge across all contexts, including with regard to responsiveness and a commitment to strengthening the conduct and accountability of uniformed personnel. I am of the opinion that responsiveness and accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse are critical elements that need to be considered as part of a holistic assessment of suitability for deployment in United Nations peacekeeping operations. In 2024, the

⁶ Annex I to the report of the Secretary-General on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission ([A/78/248](#)) contains information regarding each case referred to national authorities by the Organization and the status of actions taken by the States concerned, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [62/63](#).

⁷ See <https://conduct.unmissions.org>.

Organization will continue to work with participating Member States to address sexual exploitation and abuse with the seriousness it warrants.

VI. Prioritizing victims' rights and dignity

43. The United Nations Victims' Rights Statement, endorsed by the Secretary-General's High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in May 2023, is intended to empower victims by raising awareness of their rights. These include the rights to be treated with respect, to receive assistance and support, to protection, to privacy and confidentiality, and to justice and accountability. This information will be available on dedicated webpages in a number of local languages, and through a social media campaign launched by the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate.

44. Senior Victims' Rights Officers, where they are deployed, are the main point of contact for sexual exploitation and abuse victims, ensuring coordinated support and assistance and providing a liaison between victims, United Nations system entities and implementing partners. They accompany victims throughout the reporting and investigation process and help them access support. Their deployment has demonstrated that the presence of a person dedicated to championing victims' rights rebuilds trust with the individual and the community. More such positions are needed.

45. The trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, established in 2016 by the Secretary-General, has received \$4.8 million since its inception. These funds include contributions from 24 Member States as well as payments withheld from United Nations personnel following substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. Approximately \$1.3 million is earmarked for approved projects in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Haiti and South Sudan, with additional projects to start in 2024. The trust fund remains a vital mechanism to fill gaps in services and strengthen victims' rights and safe access to assistance. WHO allocated \$2 million to establish a Survivor Assistance Fund to facilitate quicker provision of support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by WHO personnel.⁸

46. IOM, UNHCR, UNOPS and WHO have recruited, or are recruiting, staff dedicated to supporting victims. This complements the work of the four Senior Victims' Rights Officers and the six Victims' Rights Focal Points.⁹ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has endorsed inter-agency sexual exploitation and abuse referral procedures,¹⁰ which ensure that complaints are referred directly to the entity concerned, thereby resulting in expedited victim support and ensuring follow-up and investigation.

47. A system-wide scenario-based training module on the victims' rights-based and victim-centred approach to sexual misconduct was launched in early 2023. It includes victims' perspectives and is adaptable to varying contexts. It has been delivered to several Member States and United Nations entities at the Headquarters and field levels to encourage widespread use. A module on support for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse has been added to the gender-based violence case management guidelines, ensuring that victims have access to specialized support through existing gender-based violence programming. UNICEF is providing training and support to

⁸ In the two years since the establishment of the Fund, it has been used mostly in support of victims in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

⁹ The Victims' Rights Focal Points are in Botswana, Cuba, Guatemala, Liberia, Uruguay and the State of Palestine.

¹⁰ Available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/deputies-group/iasc-guidance-note-inter-agency-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-referral-procedures-ia-sea-rp>.

strengthen the approaches of country teams and inter-agency networks to victim assistance.

48. Regrettably, services for victims are chronically underfunded, not sustained or non-existent in contexts where the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse is highest, and delays in the disbursement of funds hinder the provision of timely support and assistance to victims. The trust fund was not intended, and is unable, to provide long-term or continuous support that fully meets the needs of all victims and children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse in all locations. The approach of placing the rights and dignity of victims at the forefront of the Organization's efforts must be institutionalized and mainstreamed in order to move from mere understanding to full implementation.

VII. Paternity

49. In 2023, I committed to elaborate on progress made toward resolving paternity and child support claims involving United Nations peace operations personnel (see [A/77/748](#), para. 36). There have been 527 children reported to have been born of sexual exploitation and abuse since 2010, with 72 of those claims received in 2023. The United Nations is strengthening its facilitation of paternity claims to promote individual accountability. It is also strengthening national structures, laws and related institutions of Member States. Emphasis is being placed on Member States' responsibility to facilitate paternity claims at the national level, including by designating paternity focal points and encouraging individual accountability.

50. In cases where paternity claims involve United Nations uniformed personnel, the Secretariat notifies the Member State concerned and requests facilitation of the claim, including through DNA paternity testing where applicable. In 2023, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate engaged extensively with a number of countries of alleged fathers.

51. While some Member States have made efforts to find resolution, this has not been consistent or widespread. A high-level task force was established in late 2022 to address the lack of progress being made on paternity cases. The task force is working with Member States to develop a framework for action that strengthens engagement and cooperation between the Secretariat and Member States in accelerating the resolution of claims involving military, police and civilian United Nations peace operations personnel. The task force has also launched a strategic communications plan to raise awareness of the challenges involved and to advocate with Member States for commitment to urgently finding solutions.

52. The role of Member States in facilitating the resolution of paternity and child maintenance claims is an integral part of their peacekeeping responsibilities. The Secretariat will continue to follow up with Member States, requesting action on pending paternity and child support claims involving uniformed personnel.

53. Recognizing that transparency is an integral part of accountability, public reporting of paternity claims data will be enhanced on the Conduct in United Nations field missions web page in 2024. Information will be published on the overall number of claims pending resolution by Member States, the length of time a claim has been pending and whether paternity has been established. Criteria will be developed to assess Member State responsiveness to such claims as an element in evaluating their overall peacekeeping performance and will be a factor considered in future selection and deployment of peacekeeping personnel.

54. Only a fraction of cases concerning paternity and child support claims have been resolved. Notably, 75 per cent of paternity and/or child support claims related to peace

missions in Haiti have been pending for over 10 years. As noted in my previous report (A/77/748), urgent action is needed to bring resolution and justice to victims whose cases remain unresolved. We need the unwavering commitment of Member States to provide support to victims and their children, where applicable. Claims also surface after the closure of missions, which means that we must implement measures which support the resolution of claims in post-mission contexts.

55. We continue to advocate for additional financial support for the trust fund among Member States, especially those with long-standing unresolved paternity and/or child support claims. One possible approach to ensuring the provision of interim assistance to victims and their children by the United Nations and concerned troop- and police-contributing countries would be to withhold reimbursements due to those countries. Other approaches to consider include having concerned troop- and police-contributing countries make contributions to the trust fund or propose modalities of payments to victims directly until child support payments are secured from the father.

VIII. Engagement with Member States and civil society

56. Effective responses to sexual exploitation and abuse demand strong collective and collaborative actions between the United Nations and its partners, including Member States, regional organizations, civil society and local communities. Sharing best practices and coordinating efforts will enhance our ability to combat sexual exploitation and abuse. Important initiatives have been launched to strengthen our efforts in this regard.

57. The inter-agency working group on the operationalization of the 2018 United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners harmonized its guidance on using the common assessment tool and building partner capacity.¹¹ In May 2023, the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse module, which includes a resource library on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse to share guidance and provide a repository of resources to strengthen partner capacity, was officially launched in the United Nations Partner Portal. Webinars and in-person training sessions, reaching more than 3,000 personnel from United Nations agencies and partner organizations, were held to promote use of the portal.

58. UNHCR, in partnership with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, provides targeted support to local NGOs through the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse community outreach and communication fund. This will be strengthened through recommendations made in an evidence-based report in 2023. Seventy UNDP country offices have reporting mechanisms in place for local communities to report allegations, and 85 country offices have identified local victim support mechanisms.

59. In 2023, the Secretariat launched the Member State module, a dedicated online platform that provides detailed information on misconduct complaints against each Member State's uniformed personnel, based on the Case Management Tracking System, to expedite the handling of conduct and discipline cases and contribute to risk management and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Secretariat has informed Member States about this tool and provided information on its use.

¹¹ The inter-agency working group comprises UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO as founding members, with an expanding membership that now includes FAO, ILO, IOM, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNDP, UNOPS and UN-Women.

60. In close collaboration with the Office of the Special Coordinator, UNICEF continued to lead the inter-agency work to establish a system-wide global framework for cooperation with Governments, which establishes shared commitments, obligations and areas of cooperation on prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse. The Office of the Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate continue to engage with Governments of Member States, civil society and other stakeholders regarding the development of common effective approaches to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

61. Our efforts are collective, the responsibilities shared, and the reputational consequences of failing to protect borne equally. We recognize that there are system-wide challenges to building a comprehensive approach, which have resulted in fragmentation of efforts. To better understand these challenges, WHO convened a stakeholder review conference on prevention and response to sexual misconduct for United Nations officials, agencies, civil society, academia and all 193 Member States towards the end of 2023. The outcomes of the conference highlighted the need for cultural change; stronger collaboration between the United Nations and its partners, from prevention to response; increased resource mobilization for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, particularly in high-risk contexts; and the redesign and deployment of targeted support for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

62. We need to engage actively and remain committed to working closely with Member States and all relevant stakeholders to implement effective solutions. Only through sustained, unified action can we safeguard the integrity of our collective work and honour the trust placed in us by those we serve.

IX. Communications

63. My Special Coordinator is focused on strengthening both internal and external communications across the United Nations and is building its internal capacity to develop a comprehensive systemwide communications strategy. This will ensure that the United Nations truly speaks with one voice and maximizes opportunities to spread awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse, its consequences and the zero-tolerance policy for such acts and for failure to take appropriate action. Communication tools should also be used to enhance education on the available means of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and to influence behaviour throughout the Organization.

X. Overview of data on allegations

64. Progress in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be assessed solely by the number of allegations. Interpreting the data in the light of the local context is essential. Fewer allegations could indicate that there is an ineffective complaints mechanism. Victims may fear not being believed or protected, no action being taken or facing retaliation. While the number of allegations may provide insights into trends, progress must be measured by our efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse through enforcing values, respect, standards of conduct, training, vetting, risk mitigation and effective response, and also upholding the rights of victims.

A. Peacekeeping and special political missions

65. A total of 100 allegations were reported in peacekeeping and special political missions in 2023, an increase from the 79 reported in 2022. This is only the second time in the past 10 years that 100 or more allegations have been recorded in one year.

The increase is mainly attributable to allegations of incidents which took place more than two years before being reported, with 68 such reports in 2023. The number of allegations concerning incidents occurring in the same year as the allegation, or the year prior, is decreasing, with 26 such reports in 2023, compared with 31 in 2022. The years of six reported incidents have yet to be determined.

66. The allegations recorded in 2023 identify 143 victims, comprising 115 adults and 28 children. This is similar to the 147 victims identified in 2022, with a decrease from the 35 child victims reported in 2022. Ten allegations received in 2023 involve multiple victims.

67. Of the allegations reported in 2023, 71 related to acts of sexual exploitation of adult victims, compared with 61 such allegations in 2022. Twenty-one allegations concerned sexual abuse involving child victims alone or with adult victims, compared with 18 such reports in 2022. The allegations recorded in 2023 involve at least 149 perpetrators. Seventy allegations recorded in 2023 were associated with 93 paternity and child support claims.¹²

68. Ninety per cent of allegations were from two missions alone. MONUSCO, including the former United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), accounted for 66 allegations – two-thirds of the total – while the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic accounted for 24. The remaining allegations were recorded in three other peacekeeping missions, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (6), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (1) and the former United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (1), and in two special political missions, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (1) and the recently closed United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (1).

69. There were increases in allegations involving each category of United Nations personnel in 2023. There were 67 allegations involving military personnel, compared with 58 in 2022; 8 allegations involving police or other Government-provided personnel, compared with 5 in 2022; and 25 allegations involving civilian personnel, compared with 16 in 2022.

70. A growing number of allegations relate to incidents that occurred more than two years before being reported. This trend has continued over the past five years. Sixty-eight per cent of allegations recorded in 2023 concerned events occurring in 2021 or earlier, while 59 per cent of allegations reported in 2022 concerned events occurring in 2020 or earlier. Notably, for MONUSCO and MONUC, 79 per cent of reports in 2023 were associated with incidents occurring in 2021 or earlier. Those reports include 15 concerning MONUC, which ended in 2010. This may indicate that victims feel more encouraged, or find it easier, to report incidents after several years, particularly when they learn that a mission will be closing soon, as is the situation with MONUSCO. It could also be an indication that prevention measures are helping to reduce the number of allegations associated with more recent events.

71. The past year has seen significant changes in the footprint of United Nations peacekeeping, with the closure of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the beginning of the disengagement of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is critical to ensure that existing institutional sexual exploitation and abuse knowledge and capacities within MONUSCO do not disappear, by exploring options for an enhanced Resident Coordinator Office. This is required to address pending allegations, receive new reports implicating former Mission personnel, provide ongoing support and assistance

¹² Further information on allegations is available at <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>.

to victims, including the facilitation of paternity claims, and prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in a post-mission context. The Secretariat will continue to work to fill gaps stemming from the closure of peacekeeping missions. I have asked my Special Coordinator to lead, with my Victims' Rights Advocate, an integrated effort to develop a broader strategy for managing the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse during and beyond the presence of a peace operation, including a review of gaps and challenges, and a strategy for ensuring sustainable and resourced capacities.

72. OIOS investigation reports are outstanding for 17 allegations involving uniformed or civilian personnel reported in 2022. This represents a decrease in the number of investigations pending completion for over one year, compared with last year's data. Decisions on potential sanctions by the United Nations for substantiated allegations against staff members are pending with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance in relation to five allegations, and with UNDP for two allegations involving United Nations Volunteers. All were reported in 2021 or 2022, with investigations completed within the last six months.

73. Further targeted high-level engagements with troop- and police-contributing countries have continued to enable them to address pending matters. Updates on investigations conducted by 24 Member States into 138 allegations recorded in 2022 or earlier have yet to be received. This is consistent with the data from last year. Information on accountability measures taken by 29 Member States in relation to 66 substantiated allegations recorded in 2022 or earlier involving uniformed personnel has not yet been received.

74. Efforts to address pending paternity and child support claims continue. Additional Member States are now comparing DNA profiles of children with those of alleged fathers, resulting in paternity being established in a few more instances. Nonetheless, of the 576 paternity claims recorded by the United Nations since 2010, paternity has been established in only 63 instances, and has been ruled out in 94. Over 70 per cent of all claims received remain unresolved, with some pending for more than a decade. For uniformed personnel, 296 claims are pending with 31 Member States.

75. Additional information, including information on the Member States with pending allegations and paternity and child support claims, is provided in the supplementary information to the present report.¹³

B. Agencies, funds and programmes

76. In 2023, 284 allegations relating to personnel of agencies, funds and programmes were reported, compared with 164 in 2022. Six allegations have been substantiated, 15 have been determined to be unsubstantiated, 45 are under investigation, 88 are under assessment and 130 have been closed due to lack of evidence and/or separation of the alleged perpetrators from the entity, either at their own initiative or by the entity on grounds of other misconduct. Of the 164 allegations reported in 2022, 48 were under investigation, 12 were substantiated, 8 were unsubstantiated, 43 were under assessment and 53 had been closed.

¹³ Data on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are provided in the supplementary information to the present report, available at www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/secretary-generals-reports. Section III.B of that supplementary information contains data regarding allegations involving members of national military contingents under United Nations command, which are subject to the exclusive criminal jurisdiction of the States contributing such personnel.

C. Allegations involving personnel of implementing partners

77. In 2023, 374 allegations relating to personnel of implementing partners not under the authority of the United Nations were reported, compared with 291 in 2022.

D. Non-United Nations forces

78. No allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by members of non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate were received in 2023. OHCHR continued to engage with Member States in relation to past allegations, advocating the establishment of processes leading to redress for victims and accountability for perpetrators. Most of these allegations involve members of forces which are no longer deployed and relate to events alleged to have occurred several years ago.

79. The inclusion of robust safeguarding frameworks in the mandates of all peace operations, including non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate, is critical. Such frameworks should underpin every phase of the process, from preparation and planning to deployment and oversight. They should encompass prevention, screening, specialized training, zero-tolerance policies, survivor and victim support, mechanisms to ensure timely and transparent investigations and measures to hold perpetrators accountable. In the context of the deployment of the Multinational Security Support Mission to Haiti, my Special Coordinator advocated robust prevention and accountability measures regarding sexual exploitation and abuse. While such legal frameworks are crucial, their effective implementation at the field level, including through regular monitoring and evaluation to address any gaps, is vital. OHCHR stands ready to support the implementation of Security Council resolution requirements on human rights, including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, in collaboration with relevant partners. This forward-looking approach should be replicated in all future deployments, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

XI. Resourcing our efforts

80. I am grateful to the Member States that have provided funding to the Office of the Special Coordinator through extrabudgetary resources and have contributed to the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, the trust fund and other programmatic activities. The transition of the Office of the Special Coordinator to the regular budget has provided predictability and represents a recognition of the fact that the costs associated with protection from sexual exploitation and abuse are part of the cost of operating and maintaining organizational performance.

81. Nonetheless, work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is severely underfunded and underresourced at both the Headquarters and field levels, undermining our ability to improve prevention activities, investigative capacity and support to victims. A protection from sexual exploitation and abuse mapping exercise led by UNICEF and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2022 found that almost half of countries with humanitarian response plans had fewer than 25 per cent of the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse resources required.

82. The resources available are limited, unpredictable and unsustainable, which results in a lack of continuity, high staff turnover and numerous vacancies of critical personnel. This creates additional challenges and hinders implementation of action plans at the country level, diminishing our collective efforts and achievements. Adequate and sustained resourcing is essential for the implementation of our strategy

to respond to and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. Prioritizing the funding of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators within United Nations country teams, where appropriate, will facilitate system-wide coordination and significantly enhance support to victims.

83. We are constantly advocating for available resources to be used effectively and for greater efficiencies to be found, where possible. Improved coordination not only ensures a simplified and more accountable system in which relevant actors speak with one voice and act together towards a more enabling environment, but also provides greater opportunities to share resources for maximum impact.

XII. Conclusion, recommendations and way ahead

84. Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2003/13](#) has remained the basis of my strategy, and that of my predecessors, since 2003. The Organization has developed standards of conduct, a framework, policies, procedures and training over the past 20 years. We now need to ensure that these are institutionalized and properly resourced throughout the United Nations system. All our personnel must fully understand what is expected of them, the damage that results from sexual exploitation and abuse and what they can expect if they commit such an offence. The Secretariat will review the standards originally outlined in the bulletin, drawing from lessons learned over the past 20 years.

85. Last year I instructed my Special Coordinator to explore how we could better integrate protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in all United Nations activities and programmes ([A/77/748](#), para. 67). He has since commissioned a comprehensive assessment to determine how best to achieve this. The assessment will set out a proposed strategy for ensuring sustainable, effective protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system, along with options for predictable and adequate resourcing for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse work at Headquarters and in the field.

86. My Special Coordinator will continue to seek ways to strengthen and support leadership, recognizing the tremendous influence that leaders have on shaping the Organization's culture.

87. I recognize that the current economic and political climate is a difficult one. We have been confronted by wars and conflicts, energy crises and a global economic downturn. But make no mistake, fighting the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse is essential to our work. It is as vital to our operations as food and water. This is a battle which we must fight aggressively. Sexual exploitation and abuse harms individuals and undermines the impact, integrity and credibility of the entire Organization, our missions, agencies, implementing partners and uniformed contributors.

88. I call upon all Member States to give their full commitment, cooperation and support to our collective efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse throughout the United Nations system, consistent with our duty to protect people and communities from harm. I ask that our troop- and police-contributing countries fully adhere to these principles when deploying personnel. Sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be allowed to exist in the United Nations. Now is the time to reignite our collective efforts.