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## **Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment**

### **Report by the Director-General**

1. This report provides an overview of the actions taken by the Secretariat in response to decision EB148(4) adopted by the Executive Board at its 148th session on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, as well as the broader steps taken to strengthen the Organization's efforts to address this matter. The report covers the period June to November 2021.
2. Two significant events influenced the progress of WHO's work in the area during the period under review: the establishment by the Director-General of dedicated core capacity in the Secretariat to coordinate the work on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; and the publication of the management response to the report of the Independent Commission on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during the tenth outbreak of Ebola virus disease in North Kivu and Ituri provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>1</sup>
3. On 1 July, 2021, the Director-General initiated steps to build capacity to urgently implement the institutional changes needed to introduce effective prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment across the Organization by appointing a Director ad interim, reporting directly to him. He also established an Organization-wide task team comprising 28 senior officials from all accountability and enabling functions and the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, the Senior Advisor on Gender, and representatives of each of the six Regional Directors drawn from different functions, including Heads of WHO country offices. Since August 2021 the task team developed, and has been implementing, a workplan that encompasses actions to address prevention and response aligned with actions requested in decision EB148(4), as well as promoting best practice across the United Nations system and the development and humanitarian sectors.
4. The report of the Independent Commission on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during the 10th Ebola Outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri provinces, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, issued on 28 September 2021,<sup>2</sup> concluded that: sexual exploitation and abuse happened in the

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<sup>1</sup> WHO. Preventing & responding to sexual exploitation and abuse: WHO management response to the Report of the Independent Commission to investigate allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the 10th Ebola Virus Disease epidemic in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, of 28 September 2021. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 ([https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ethics/who-management-response-20211020-finalv2.pdf?sfvrsn=591a9adf\\_12&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ethics/who-management-response-20211020-finalv2.pdf?sfvrsn=591a9adf_12&download=true), accessed 3 December 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Independent Commission on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during the Response to the 10th Ebola Outbreak in DRC. Final Report of the Independent Commission on the review of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the 10th Ebola virus disease epidemic in DRC. Geneva: World Health Organization; September 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/final-report-of-the-independent-commission-on-the-review-of-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-ebola-drc>, accessed 3 December 2021).

context of the response to that outbreak and the Organization did not take adequate actions to prevent it, actions that included conducting a comprehensive risk assessment, putting in place preventive measures, enabling outreach to local populations and reporting of incidents from the outset of the emergency operations; and there was a failure or lack of mechanisms in the Organization to identify and appropriately address potential opportunities for or instances of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Independent Commission's report made recommendations in eight areas, some of which were specific to the country and others which were applicable to WHO overall. The Secretariat has been transparent in its communication of the report with all key stakeholders: Member States, staff members, media, the public and representatives of the alleged victims and survivors. The release of the report was accompanied by a rapid and comprehensive consultation with Member States, all regional offices and senior managers in the Organization so as to facilitate the drafting of the WHO Management Response Plan.<sup>1</sup> The Plan and its accompanying implementation plan<sup>2</sup> have been posted on WHO's website to ensure continued transparency and accountability, and are now being implemented.

## **A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK FOR WORK ON PREVENTION OF AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

5. The WHO Management Response Plan presents a unified framework that outlines WHO's actions to respond to all recommendations made in the Independent Commission's report, implement decision EB148(4) and promote best practices from other entities in the United Nations system and nongovernmental organizations. The Plan brings together the Organization's work on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and its efforts to implement its policies and procedures on addressing abusive conduct.<sup>3</sup> It dovetails with the many Organization-wide actions under the Respectful Workplace Initiative. The Plan is a living document and will be implemented in two phases. It addresses the short-term recommendations of the Independent Commission and lays the foundation for effective work while a longer-term strategy is developed for the period 2023–2025. It will contribute towards reaching the goals of zero tolerance for, and for inaction against, sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

6. In the short term (mid-October 2021 to March 2022), the Management Response Plan prioritizes: complementing the investigation of the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse outlined in the Independent Commission's report with assistance from the United Nations Office for Internal Oversight Services; conducting an investigation into alleged professional negligence by WHO personnel; ensuring support is provided to survivors and victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment perpetrated by WHO personnel; conducting an audit of the management of cases by WHO's accountability functions; and mobilizing WHO's entire workforce for the implementation of the Plan.

7. To put these actions into operation, the Secretariat has agreed with the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee that the latter will oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Commission. WHO has issued a request for proposals to select an

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<sup>1</sup> WHO Management Response Plan: meeting report. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-management-response-plan>, accessed 6 December 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Implementation Plan (IP) of the WHO Management Response to the Report of the Independent Commission to investigate allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the 10th Ebola Virus Disease epidemic in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-implementation-plan>, accessed 3 December 2021).

<sup>3</sup> WHO. Policy: WHO sexual exploitation and abuse prevention and response: policy and procedures. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/preventing-and-addressing-abusive-conduct>, accessed 3 December 2021).

independent supplier to undertake an audit of the Secretariat's case management of allegations and complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The audit will cover all allegations and complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, together with a random sample of allegations and/or complaints of harassment, received by the Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics Department or the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the Secretariat during the period 1 August 2018 to 30 September 2021. The audit also will be overseen by the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee. In addition, WHO and the United Nations Office for Internal Oversight Services have agreed that the latter will complement the investigations conducted by the Independent Commission and its external investigative team in order to positively identify additional alleged perpetrators, in compliance with WHO's investigative requirements, and, under the oversight of the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee, to review whether there has been failure on behalf of WHO's management to initiate investigative processes where warranted.

8. WHO is routinely using the "ClearCheck" screening database of the United Nations system to share information across entities in the United Nations system to avoid the hiring and re-hiring of perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. As sufficient information becomes available on allegations of these acts, the names and details of alleged perpetrators who have been employed by WHO are entered into the database in accordance with the relevant rules, including, when applicable, the names of alleged perpetrators identified in the report of the Independent Commission. By early December 2021 a total of 14 names of alleged perpetrators from the report had been entered into the database. The use of the database to screen potential staff and consultants is being extended across the Organization. For example, it has been used to screen personnel deployed during the thirteenth outbreak of Ebola virus disease in the Beni Health Zone in North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in October 2021, and to complete the vetting of all the polio experts in the database of 2400 personnel.

9. Concerning victim and survivor support, in November 2021 WHO and UNICEF jointly led an Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Mission to Goma and Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, with representatives from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. Members of the mission team met with various stakeholders, including the humanitarian country team, partner agencies, government officials, nongovernmental and community-based organizations, victims and survivors, and donor organizations. The objectives of the mission included the implementation of relevant actions from WHO's Management Response Plan, assessment of progress made since the previous mission of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee a year before and formulation of recommendations for the further strengthening work on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the country.

10. The mission also advanced support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse from the tenth Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the finalization of a memorandum of understanding between WHO and UNFPA to ensure that all victims and survivors receive the support they need. WHO will provide the financial support required to support those victims and survivors of actions perpetrated by all individuals identified by the Independent Commission, as well as the children born as a result. The Secretariat mapped the services already accessed by the victims, using data provided by UNFPA and the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. The memorandum of understanding covers activities, funded by WHO and implemented under the supervision of UNFPA, to assess the current medical, psychological, legal, socioeconomic and reintegration needs of victims and survivors and to examine the needs of children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse. WHO is collaborating with a well-established women-led legal aid nongovernmental organization in the country to ensure that the victims who want to pursue legal action are supported to do so. The Secretariat will in addition support integrated and holistic services for victims through nongovernmental organizations, including HEAL Africa. The United Nations humanitarian country team is developing a

standard framework for victim-support services and the Secretariat will align with this framework once it is validated by the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. Members of the mission also met: the Provincial Governor of North Kivu in Goma; the national Minister of Public Health, Hygiene and Prevention in Kinshasa to discuss government action related to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and the newly-formed National Commission on the subject; the Vice-Minister of Public Health, Hygiene and Prevention to discuss the strengthening of referral services for gender-based violence that any victim can access; and the Minister of Gender, Family and Children for scaling up protection and legal aid for victims of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

11. In the medium term (November 2021 to December 2022) WHO's Management Response Plan seeks: to define, internalize and operationalize a victim- and survivor-centered approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment across the Organization; to develop and enforce an accountability framework for all personnel that is accompanied by training and building capacity and outlining enhanced responsibilities for supervisors, managers and senior managers; and to reform WHO's culture, structures, policies, processes and practices to enable effective work in the area. A three-year Organization-wide strategy for the period 2023–2025 on tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment will be a major longer-term result of the response plan.

## **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR PREVENTION, DETECTION AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

12. Strong leadership is essential to achieve zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The Director-General and the six Regional Directors lead the Organization's work on the matter. A new WHO public website on the subject was launched in July 2021, providing easy access to key documents, including the report of the Independent Commission, the Management Response Plan, the implementation plan and a monthly newsletter on progress, which promotes greater transparency and accountability.<sup>1</sup>

13. A comprehensive review of WHO's relevant policies and procedures has been launched to identify gaps and inconsistencies in relation to the WHO regulatory framework as well as with regard to existing best practice in this area and to address specific concerns identified in the context of the findings of the Independent Commission. In the interim, WHO's new Policy Directive on protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse came into effect on 3 December 2021 with the aim of clarifying and aligning with the key elements of the United Nations Secretary-General's Bulletin 2003/13, including definitions of sexual exploitation and abuse,<sup>2</sup> as well as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee core principles<sup>3</sup> and minimum operating standards<sup>4</sup> and the clause on the subject recently adopted by WHO and 15 donor Member States. The Directive also aligns with the United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> WHO. Preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/initiatives/preventing-and-responding-to-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment>, accessed 3 December 2021).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Secretariat. Secretary-General's Bulletin: special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Document ST/SGB/2003/13. New York: United Nations; 2003 (<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/se-st-sgb-2003-13.php>, accessed 3 December 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee. IASC six core principles relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, 2019. New York: United Nations; 2019 (<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/iasc-six-core-principles-relating-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>, accessed 3 December 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Minimum operating standards (MOS-PSEA). New York: United Nations; 2016 (<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-accountability-affected-populations-and-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/minimum-operating-standards-mos-psea>, accessed 3 December 2021).

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protocol on assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse<sup>1</sup> and the United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners.<sup>2</sup>

14. In the longer term, as set out in the Management Response Plan, the ambition is to create a comprehensive, updated, easy-to-use policy framework that will consolidate all relevant updated policies, accompanied by procedures and implementation guidance.

15. WHO's Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct,<sup>3</sup> which covers sexual harassment in addition to other forms of harassment, discrimination and abuse of authority, came into effect on 1 March 2021. The policy, which revises and updates the Organization's previous harassment policy, strengthens the coherence of the complaints process, while taking into account the need to pay particular attention to claims and allegations relating to sexual harassment. The implementation plan, which is being introduced, includes the dissemination of new communication materials and resources for the workforce, the creation of guidance tools for managers and supervisors, the development and delivery of new training sessions tailored to the needs of different audiences, and updating of related human resources instruments and processes. Particular emphasis is being placed on ensuring that the necessary training and other forms of support are in place across the Organization. Moreover, a system has been established to ensure the implementation of the policy's prevention measures in all offices. In addition, the recently established Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response Task Team is coordinating efforts to build institutional capacity to ensure the effective prevention of and response to sexual harassment.

16. The Secretariat's core capacity to receive and investigate complaints and allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment is being strengthened. A Head of Investigations ad interim was appointed in November 2021 to focus on sexual misconduct cases and strengthen the specialized expertise needed to handle such cases effectively and efficiently within WHO. In addition the reporting hotline (the "Integrity Hotline") is being streamlined. Safe and accessible reporting mechanisms which incur no fear of retaliation are essential for both the WHO workforce and the communities that the Organization serves, and will be essential to building trust and countering the perception of impunity for perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. As such, the Secretariat will review the internal reporting mechanisms and the entire process from suspicions, raising alerts, complaints, investigations to administrative actions as a whole under the planned audit. The Secretariat will report to Member States and on the website aggregate figures on a quarterly basis and, over time, report on trends.

17. The Secretariat is developing an agency-specific tool for risk assessment of sexual exploitation and abuse, which it will pilot in several priority countries in 2022 before integrating it into the Organization's broader enterprise-wide risk management framework. Furthermore, the reporting on

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. New York; United Nations; 2019 ([https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/UN%20Victim%20Assistance%20Protocol\\_English\\_Final.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/UN%20Victim%20Assistance%20Protocol_English_Final.pdf), accessed 3 December 2021).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners. New York; United Nations (<https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/UN%20Protocol%20on%20SEA%20Allegations%20involving%20Implementing%20Partners.pdf>, accessed 3 December 2021).

<sup>3</sup> WHO. Preventing and addressing abusive conduct: Policy and procedures concerning harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/preventing-and-addressing-abusive-conduct>, accessed 3 December 2021).

relevant control measures will be fully integrated into the annual internal control self-assessment checklist questionnaire.

18. An initial core budget of US\$ 30 million has been allocated to work on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment for the biennium 2022–2023. Additional resources will need to be mobilized for prevention, detection and response activities in field operations and community-facing programmes. As at November 2021 WHO had a network of more than 50 country focal points on the subject in 30 countries, who are being supported with capacity-building, and training and activities. Focus will be on country impact, with 46% of the funds being allocated to country offices, 17.6% to regional offices, 13.4% to headquarters and 23% to cross-organization activities for all levels of the Organization, including a victims' assistance fund.

### **TACKLING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN HIGH-RISK SETTINGS**

19. Sexual exploitation and abuse can happen in any setting but the risk is significantly increased during health emergencies and in any programme that brings WHO personnel into direct contact with communities in need of assistance. WHO is prioritizing interventions to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse as its primary strategy, while scaling up detection and response activities. WHO's prevention capacity, especially in high-risk settings, including the polio eradication programme, is being strengthened in several ways. WHO's Emergency Response Framework is being updated to clarify the central role of prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in all health emergencies, and the related actions have been included as a core function of incident managers at the global level and in field operations. Ways to put the updated Emergency Response Framework into operation are being reviewed across the three levels of the Organization. The first senior expert was deployed to Ethiopia in the context of the humanitarian response in the Tigray region, and expertise in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment was provided for the response to the thirteenth outbreak of Ebola virus disease in the Beni Health Zone in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The subject constitutes a core component of WHO's strategic response plan for both these emergency health responses.

20. The Secretariat is establishing full-time capacity for prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment with new staff positions at P.4 level in 12 priority countries (identified through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the polio programme), a senior coordinator post in each of the six regional offices, and a coordinating office at Headquarters headed by a director reporting to the Director-General. The WHO Health Emergencies Programme has established a dedicated cell in its Response Division to provide operational support and to liaise closely with the coordinating office and broader accountability functions. Each Regional Director has a team of senior staff members working on the matter in close collaboration with the coordinating office. The Response Division holds monthly meetings with Heads of WHO country offices in fragile and conflict-affected countries to resolve issues and strengthen senior management in this area.

21. A review of prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment during the thirteenth outbreak of Ebola virus disease in the Beni Health Zone in the Democratic Republic of the Congo showed that several safeguarding measures had been undertaken by the humanitarian community, including the subregional Inter-Agency Standing Committee coordinator responsible for this area of work, whose position is funded by WHO. These measures included screening by WHO of all personnel deployed for the response through the ClearCheck database, the training of responders including governmental and national responders, the assignment of a government focal point for prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, the sensitization of

communities regarding standards of behaviour to expect from responders, and the establishment of community-based complaint mechanisms linked to the national hotline.

## **STAFF ENGAGEMENT, AWARENESS AND CAPACITY-BUILDING**

22. WHO introduced the new United Nations mandatory training on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in October 2021, which all personnel will have to complete within three months, and all new personnel working in emergencies must complete before they can work in or be deployed to the field. An interim WHO-specific training is available and is being used to brief and train staff members across the Organization. A module on the subject has been introduced for the first time into staff induction briefings, which by end November 2021 had been delivered to 60 new heads of country offices and an additional 134 new staff members. The module will be refined for wider implementation. Materials are being developed for introduction into pre-deployment training for health emergency responders, country readiness training, Health Cluster Coordinator training, front-line polio worker training and training for Emergency Medical Teams, the Global Outbreak and Alert Response Network and other networks and partners associated with WHO, including the WHO Global Emergency Operations Centres Network.

23. The engagement of personnel for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment intensified during 2021. This is part of a #NoExcuse engagement campaign that will ensure that each and every person working for and with WHO knows the zero tolerance goals related to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, knows and acts on their responsibility to report any suspicions, and is aware of the enhanced responsibilities of supervisors and managers. The #NoExcuse campaign increases the awareness of managers concerning the responsibility they have to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and that promotes timely action and response to incidents, including reporting to WHO's investigational services. WHO vacancy notices and procurement contracts now outline WHO's position and conditions regarding prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

24. Thus, WHO is reaffirming with all personnel and partners that they have an obligation not just to abstain from any behaviour that may constitute sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, but also an obligation to report any suspected incidents through established reporting processes. Managers, senior managers, heads of country offices all have an added role to play to create the systems and environment for effective prevention, early detection, safe reporting and support to victims and survivors.

25. Following the introduction of WHO's Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct on 1 March 2021, the Secretariat implemented a communication campaign to raise the workforce's awareness of abusive conduct, the support available within the Organization, and the mechanisms through which reports may be made and offenders held accountable. Actions to promote engagement have included Organization-wide information sessions, dissemination of communication and guidance materials, and ongoing training at all levels of the Organization. Special emphasis has been placed on the role of managers and supervisors and the empowerment of all members of the workforce to immediately intervene or to report instances of abusive conduct.

26. Almost 3600 personnel attended the Global Town Hall meeting with the Director-General related to the launch of the Independent Commission's report. All Regional Directors have also held Town Hall meetings in their respective regions to sensitize their workforce on this issue. The global team on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment held briefings and training sessions for 2500 personnel between July and November 2021, reaching personnel across all

levels of the Organization, including Heads of WHO country offices and their staff members, incident managers from the Regions of Africa, Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, members of the network of country focal points on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, staff members from technical departments and members of the Global Staff/Management Council at Headquarters. In addition, the Secretariat conducted an inter-agency webinar on the subject with 700 participants. Missions to the country office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo enabled the briefing of around 350 country office staff members in Kinshasa, Goma, Beni Town, Butembo and Bunia. In addition, a specific briefing has been provided to personnel from the WHO Country Office and WHO's Emergency Hub in Nairobi.

## **ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM**

27. WHO has taken concrete measures to learn from and align efforts on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment with those of other organizations in the United Nations system and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in order to strengthen significantly the Organization's inputs into system-wide efforts. WHO has been working with the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse; the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee; the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; and other entities in the United Nations system.

28. Lessons have been drawn from the experiences of partner agencies and concrete priority areas of collaboration have been identified with organizations in the United Nations system (including the International Organization for Migration, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Food Programme); various nongovernmental organizations and professional associations (including Oxfam and Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and multilateral and international organizations (including the World Bank, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, GAVI - the Vaccine Alliance, and Unitaid). The aim is to ensure WHO's alignment within the existing framework of United Nations entities and other interagency mechanisms, and to collaborate on current best practices for prevention and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

29. Since July 2021 WHO has intensified its collaboration with other bodies in the United Nations system, for instance in the areas of victim- and survivor-centred approaches and frameworks, risk assessment and management, capacity-building, dealing with sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in health emergencies, application of the United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners, and reporting through the Secretary-General's electronic Incident Reporting form among others.

30. The findings of the external review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's approach to prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, released in November 2021, which examined the body's past 10 years of work, identified some of the main barriers to inter-agency collaboration. These included: the failure of some entities to adopt a victim- and survivor-centred approach; the length of time it takes to conduct and conclude investigations across the United Nations system into sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; the overengineering of community-based complaint mechanisms, and the lack of confidence in them; and the lack of long-term cultural and attitudinal change to all forms of sexual misconduct. The report and these findings indicate that achieving the desired changes requires a long-term vision, strategy, collaboration, capacity and resources; this includes WHO becoming a strong participant in international efforts to safeguard its programmes and operations against sexual exploitation and abuse.



## OVERSIGHT

31. The Secretariat has provided quarterly updates to Member States as requested by the Board in decision EB148(4), together with ad hoc updates and briefings to Member States individually and in groups upon request.

32. Following the establishment of the task team (see paragraph 3) the Director-General invited the Chair of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme to establish a subcommittee of its members to consider how WHO's current policies and procedures on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment could be improved to achieve best-in-class status and to oversee, guide and monitor Secretariat's work in this regard.<sup>1</sup> The subcommittee constituted and consulted a reference group of interested Member States to advise on good practices in safeguarding against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and held a series of consultations with various external stakeholders and WHO staff members to compare WHO's policies, procedures, structures and resources with international best-in-class standards. The independent report of the subcommittee is submitted in an accompanying document.<sup>2</sup> The subcommittee recommends urgent action by the Secretariat in five priority areas: (1) clarifying accountabilities, lines of responsibility and delegation of authority across the Organization along with strengthening the accountability framework for emergency response; (2) reforming the Organization's management structure and strengthening organizational capacity regarding sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; (3) investing in increased staff capacity on the subject; (4) developing and implementing a risk-management structure regarding sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment during field operations; and (5) promoting institutional cultural change to strengthen prevention and response.

33. As noted in paragraph 7, the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee will provide oversight of the implementation of the Independent Commission's recommendations.

## CHALLENGES

34. Tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment is a shared responsibility. WHO has made good progress in strengthening its engagement and participation with other United Nations and humanitarian actors to address the matter in countries. However, to achieve greatest impact, the Secretariat needs to intensify its engagement with and support to governments and authorities in countries where WHO has programmes and operations.

35. The Organization has committed core funds for the establishment of institutional capacity for prevention and response, but further funding and institutional capacity are required for safeguarding WHO's community-facing programmes and response operations. As such, all emergency operations and their respective humanitarian appeals and resourcing mechanisms will have to allocate an agreed percentage of their overall budgets for supporting this area of work. Such investment is needed to implement effective prevention efforts and avert further incidents, and should be applied to other large community-facing programmes, such as the polio eradication programme.

36. Addressing the systemic issues that provide opportunities for sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment to happen within the Organization and transforming the Organization's culture

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<sup>1</sup> WHO. IOAC sub-committee on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PRSEAH). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/groups/independent-oversight-and-advisory-committee/sub-committee-on-prseah>, accessed 4 December 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Document EB150/34.

require long-term and sustained action. There is need to invest in the broader, Organization-wide accountability functions and approaches that promote a respectful workplace.

37. As the Organization expands its own capacity to tackle the matter, it relies on delivering results through implementing partners. Therefore, it needs to provide support to partners so that they have the necessary human and technical capacity to effectively implement adequate safeguarding measures.

38. The lack of expertise to fill the major gap in the human resources needed within the Secretariat and across the United Nations system is already evident. Prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment is a new area of expertise that draws on many disciplines without a well-defined educational or professional path. Existing pools of experts are limited in size, difficult to access and resource. The Secretariat proposes that efforts are made within WHO and across the United Nations system to professionalize this area of expertise and to contribute to the development of a global pool of expertise, using modern adult-learning approaches, which can support work in countries, programmes and operations.

## **CONCLUSION**

39. WHO reaffirms its commitment to zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and for inaction against it. Sexual exploitation and abuse of the people served by WHO is a grave failure of the Organization to do no harm and to protect the vulnerable. Sexual harassment and sexual abuse within the Secretariat is a fundamental failure of the Organization's duty of care to its workforce and a failure to provide a safe and respectful environment in which to serve. WHO is committed to providing a respectful work environment and to promoting and enforcing policies that respect the inherent dignity of all persons, including those whom the Organization serves. WHO has an abiding responsibility to prevent and respond to discrimination, abuse of authority, harassment, including sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

## **ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

40. The Board is invited to note the report, and to provide guidance on:

- how Member States can contribute to efforts going beyond WHO that can prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, especially in those countries where WHO has large programmes and emergency response operations;
- how to provide adequate support to efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in all response operations to health emergencies, including by creating, developing and sustaining a sufficiently large pool of experts for work on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in community-facing programmes and operations and in high-risk situations.

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