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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](#), [76/303](#), [77/333](#) and [78/331](#). It contains updates on measures taken by the United Nations in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2024 to strengthen the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.



I. Introduction

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse can arise in any context where the United Nations and its partners operate. Inequality and power imbalances create an environment that is conducive to sexual exploitation and abuse, with women and girls being disproportionately targeted by perpetrators. All organizations must guard against this risk and take effective preventive and deterrence measures, while also elevating the rights and dignity of victims. All United Nations personnel have made a commitment to not perpetrate any form of sexual exploitation and abuse, and leaders and Member States have repeatedly pledged to ensure that impunity is eradicated. These commitments must be enforced.

2. Since 2003, when the Secretary-General's bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([ST/SGB/2003/13](#)) was issued, successive Secretaries-General have established robust mechanisms to address such exploitation and abuse. In 2017, the Secretary-General launched a strategy (see [A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)) to improve the United Nations system-wide approach to: preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse; prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims; ending impunity through reporting and investigations; engaging with Member States, civil society and other partners to build a multi-stakeholder approach; and improving strategic communications for education and transparency.

3. Since 2017, there has been an increase in the number of incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse reported, which is an expected and constructive result of the enhanced protection efforts put in place. However, each of the 3,711 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (implicating 4,384 United Nations personnel) reported since 2017 undermines the relationship between the United Nations system and the populations that it serves. In 2024 alone, 675 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse were reported in connection with United Nations staff and related personnel (292) and implementing partners (383), with 27 per cent of those allegations involving child victims.

4. As acknowledged in previous reports on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, significant barriers to reporting mean that reported allegations represent only a fraction of actual sexual exploitation and abuse cases. When developing effective prevention and response strategies, it is important to take into account that, currently, many acts of sexual exploitation and abuse remain unreported, owing to systemic power imbalances and structural gender and social inequality.

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

5. The Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse continues to conduct extensive advocacy and monitoring activities in settings with elevated risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, across peacekeeping, humanitarian and development contexts. His engagement with stakeholders, including Member States, United Nations leadership, United Nations country teams, networks focused on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and civil society, is crucial for identifying persistent challenges and barriers. Such interactions allow for global and targeted advocacy initiatives with internal and external partners, facilitate the assessment of real-time weaknesses in policies and practices and advance coordinated, system-wide efforts to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. The Special Coordinator

continues to engage with uniformed and civilian personnel, as well as troop- and police-contributing countries, and participate in capacity-building activities, including predeployment and in-mission training for troops, emphasizing the importance of fostering a safe and respectful operational environment. In addition, innovative ways to connect policy and the exercise of accountability measures are being launched. For example, when the nine judges of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal visited the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in June 2024 as part of their induction into the United Nations administration of justice system, they were informed about measures in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and had the opportunity to hear from the Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate. The aim was to provide the judges with first-hand insights into the complexities and challenges associated with delivering protection from sexual exploitation and abuse on the ground, including the commitment to a victim-centred approach. The Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate also raised concerns about the impact, especially on victims, of the protracted administrative and judicial decision-making. Following the mission, the judges' reflections informed discussions and recommendations at the Third Meeting of Investigatory Bodies on Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment convened jointly by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations Evaluation Group in June 2024. The Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate are planning to conduct similar information sessions with the judges of the United Nations Appeals Tribunal during a mission to the Central African Republic scheduled to take place in early 2025.

6. As indicated in my previous report ([A/78/774](#), para. 85), the Special Coordinator commissioned an independent comprehensive assessment to recommend strategies for strengthening protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across United Nations activities and programmes and identify options for sustainable, predictable and adequate resourcing for protection efforts. As part of the assessment, the effectiveness of the existing approach, good practices and challenges in implementing protection measures were also examined. Extensive consultations covering humanitarian, development and peacekeeping contexts were held between March and October 2024 across the United Nations system, involving senior leadership, technical experts in protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, national and international implementing partners and Member State representatives. The findings were further informed by field missions in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan and Lebanon.

7. Over 90 per cent of the persons consulted confirmed that there has been an unprecedented and consistent focus on system-wide measures to combat sexual exploitation and abuse since 2017. Awareness of the Secretary-General's bulletin and the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse was universal, but levels of understanding varied. Based on the consultations, it appears that notable progress has been made, despite challenges in terms of funding, trust in accountability measures and victim support mechanisms. This progress includes the ongoing establishment of system-wide coordination efforts and standards at the global level, improved transparency in the reporting of incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse, faster investigation timelines, increased capacity at the country level and significant investment in the development of technical tools and guidance. However, while progress has been steady, it remains limited and fragile.

8. Once completed, the assessment, including its findings and recommendations, will be shared with the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and Member States for their consideration.

III. Institutionalizing protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

9. A shift from reactive responses to preventive approaches is required, including by strengthening the analysis and use of data and trends to identify and mitigate risks and continuously assessing the effectiveness of interventions. The high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse in some contexts and interventions should trigger preparedness and proactive measures, just as the absence of reports of sexual exploitation and abuse in such contexts should prompt scrutiny.

Progress in policy frameworks

10. Recent policy initiatives indicate progress in ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations issued an updated policy on the issue and a Director-General's bulletin to bolster safeguarding efforts. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued a policy on addressing sexual misconduct, outlining roles, reporting requirements for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and victim support mechanisms. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) launched its first strategy on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, structured around three pillars, namely evidence-based prevention and response, accountability with victim- and survivor-centred principles and systems-level organizational and cultural change. Other entities, including the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research are currently developing frameworks on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

11. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee revised its standards on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse to align them with United Nations system-wide policies, prioritizing a victim/survivor-centred approach. In addition, the Office of the Special Coordinator is spearheading the update of the Secretary-General's bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, drawing on inputs from United Nations entities, Member States, experts and civil society. The update will reflect evolving needs and challenges, lessons learned and evidence generated globally relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The updated bulletin will serve as the United Nations policy framework on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse to institutionalize such protection throughout the Organization.

Integration into operational planning, monitoring and evaluation

12. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is increasingly integrated into operational planning, preparedness, monitoring and evaluation. UNHCR included protection from sexual exploitation and abuse as a cross-cutting priority in refugee responses through the updated refugee coordination model guidance, and the World Health Organization (WHO) developed a checklist on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for infectious disease responses. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is also systematically incorporated into the humanitarian programme cycle through humanitarian needs and response plans.

13. United Nations entities are conducting global evaluations of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse to enhance accountability, response and prevention. For example, the evaluation conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) resulted in the establishment of a dedicated unit for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

within its executive office, while the International Organization for Migration (IOM) created an interim victim assistance fund based on the findings of its evaluation. UNFPA assessed its learning approach to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and subsequently developed an updated learning package to support organizational change. WHO is pursuing a comprehensive stocktaking review in 2025 to assess if key actions and reforms undertaken as part of its three-year strategy have produced the intended results.

14. To streamline reporting and analyse progress across multiple entities, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) implemented a standardized template on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, with common outcomes, benchmarks and metrics.

15. While the above-mentioned initiatives demonstrate an increased commitment to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the lack of dedicated, predictable resources undermines efforts to institutionalize such protection. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee global dashboard on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse reveals that, while the aggregate budget allocations for inter-agency work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse increased, the average budget for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse continues to represent a mere 0.13 per cent of the total requirements for humanitarian response plans in 2024.

16. In 2020, following demands for technical support from resident coordinators and networks focused on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the regional team of the Development Coordination Office for Asia and the Pacific began hosting a dedicated regional coordinator for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Funding for that role has been provided voluntarily by six agencies, but has not been consistent.

17. In an effort to address funding and capacity challenges at the country level, the inter-agency protection from sexual exploitation and abuse capacity project was launched in 2023 as a way to sustainably staff the 15 priority countries identified in the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Risk Overview Global Index. As at December 2024, 10 coordinators were deployed under the project. However, sustained funding is needed for other critical posts. Where project coordinators are not deployed, some country teams rely on individual entities to host coordinators for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse using temporary funding sources. A lack of predictable funding leads to high turnover and staffing gaps. A sustainably resourced inter-agency model is key to the future success of country and regional programmes on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

IV. Prevention

18. Prevention must be central to the strategy adopted by the United Nations system to combat sexual exploitation and abuse and safeguard the communities that it serves. Historically, prevention efforts were focused on organizational compliance, such as mandatory training and codes of conduct. While essential, such measures on their own do not address the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse or drive meaningful change. They must be complemented by strategies that include risk analysis and mitigation, support to implementing partners for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and enhanced screening and recruitment processes, as well as tailored and contextualized training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Risk analysis and mitigation

19. Inter-agency and agency-specific risk assessments are increasingly being adopted. Currently, 20 inter-agency country-level networks focusing on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse are implementing the inter-agency risk assessment on sexual exploitation and abuse approach, with the support of IOM.

20. As a priority under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, WFP is developing risk mapping tools on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse within the humanitarian cluster system, in order to ensure that protection from sexual exploitation and abuse becomes a systematic part of the cluster system's preparedness and response. This will build on the work of Empowered Aid in developing risk mitigation tip sheets.

21. Efforts are also being made at the entity level to strengthen risk management with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse. The Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance revised the misconduct/sexual exploitation and abuse risk management toolkit to promote a consistent and integrated approach across United Nations Headquarters and field missions. WHO now mandates annual risk assessments and mitigation exercises on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in all 155 of its country offices. UNFPA updated the terms of reference of its focal point to include risk analysis and mitigation on sexual exploitation and abuse and piloted the contextualization of its Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Risk Overview Global Index in two country offices. Going forward, it is crucial to ensure the effective coordination of these risk management mechanisms and monitor and analyse how risk assessments influence programme design and budget allocation in this regard.

Support to implementing partners

22. The Inter-agency Implementing Partner Protocol Working Group continues to prioritize the strengthening of implementing partners' capacities in terms of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, by focusing on coordinated capacity-building and addressing gaps. A review of these assessments has revealed consistent capacity challenges linked to the removal of barriers to reporting, the provision of assistance to victims and the conduct of investigations. These should be priority areas for investment. Since 2020, in partnership with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, UNHCR has awarded 65 grants to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 39 countries for community outreach and communications on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Screening and recruitment

23. Preventing perpetrators from being rehired is a key component of the new United Nations system-wide approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse. Launched in 2018, the ClearCheck database allows United Nations entities to share information about individuals who were separated from service due to substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and those with pending cases who left the service of the Organization before the completion of the investigation and/or disciplinary process, thereby preventing their re-employment across the United Nations system. In 2024, four additional United Nations entities joined the ClearCheck database, increasing participation to a total of 40 entities.

24. As at 31 December 2024, use of the ClearCheck database had prevented the rehiring of 14 individuals considered for recruitment by United Nations entities. The

ClearCheck database and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme are vital elements of prevention efforts. As there is no interaction or sharing of information between these two screening systems, there is a risk of recruiting former United Nations staff members with prior allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in non-United Nations organizations – including United Nations implementing partners – and vice versa.

25. As at December 2024, three United Nations entities (UNHCR, UNFPA and UNOPS) were using the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme and documenting lessons learned to promote complementarity between the two systems. UNHCR has integrated the use of the Scheme as a complement to its use of the ClearCheck database to prevent the movement of perpetrators between the United Nations and NGOs. UNFPA is piloting the Scheme in select locations and has developed metrics to track progress and capture learning for consideration by other entities in the United Nations system. UNDP began piloting the Scheme in early January 2025. The Secretariat is currently exploring whether the ClearCheck database and the Scheme can serve as complements to each other, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution [77/278](#).

Contextualized and tailored training

26. Training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is mandatory but is often compliance-based, with a prescriptive emphasis. While this may be helpful, it would be more effective to adopt a comprehensive capacity-building approach, thereby ensuring that United Nations personnel understand not only how to act but also why these standards matter. There is also an overreliance on one-off training sessions on commitments to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and many entities still rely primarily on mandatory online modules. This is insufficient as a main prevention tool. A broader, sustained, regular and context-specific approach is needed across the United Nations system to foster behavioural change and accountability.

27. In 2024, 99.21 per cent of respondents to the annual perception survey on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, which included 64,585 United Nations staff respondents, agreed that mandatory training increased awareness of their responsibilities. However, the results revealed troubling findings, namely that 3.65 per cent (2,360) of United Nations respondents stated that it was acceptable to pay for sex, and close to 1 per cent (555) said that it was acceptable to engage in sexual activity with a child. Alarming, one third of those respondents held supervisory positions. The survey also highlighted gaps in refresher training, with 24.29 per cent (approximately 17,000) of United Nations staff respondents reporting that they had not received additional training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year. These findings underscore the need for evidence-informed, scenario-based training, as has been emphasized in independent evaluations since 2010.

28. To sustain progress in prevention efforts, the entities in the United Nations system must address critical gaps in training, screening and risk management. Strengthening coordination between inter-agency and entity-level efforts, ensuring the complementarity of screening mechanisms and investing in evidence-based training approaches will be key to bridging these gaps and enhancing prevention. Those entities have an obligation to do no harm to the communities that they serve. This requires us to anticipate and mitigate risks of sexual exploitation and abuse while ensuring swift and decisive action on allegations.

V. Prioritizing victims' rights and dignity

29. In 2017, the Secretary-General pledged to place the rights and dignity of victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse at the forefront of the prevention and response efforts of the United Nations system. Various initiatives have been implemented to translate this pledge into action. These include the appointment of the Victims' Rights Advocate, the deployment of dedicated Senior Victims' Rights Officers and the roll-out of the United Nations protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

30. More efforts have been made during the last year to prioritize the rights of and enhance support to victims. A new Victims' Rights Advocate was appointed in May 2024. The Advocate is amplifying the voices of victims to ensure that their perspectives shape United Nations efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

31. Since her appointment, the Victims' Rights Advocate has undertaken field visits to engage directly with victims, who have highlighted their needs, including for self-sustainment and support for children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Advocate has been coordinating a system-wide effort to assess existing assistance provisions, with the aim of establishing a harmonized approach and consistent application across the system to address the variability in current practices. The Advocate has also been collaborating with United Nations entities, government institutions, civil society and national human rights organizations to strengthen holistic justice for victims. This collaboration includes the advancing of a victim-centred approach, ensuring accountability, access to remedies and the resolution of paternity and child support claims.

32. Dedicated capacity to support victims is gradually increasing. Senior Victims' Rights Officers in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan coordinate access to assistance for victims, facilitate the resolution of paternity claims, including the gathering of DNA samples, and accompany victims throughout the reporting and investigation process. Seven country offices have also appointed victims' rights focal points. Agencies such as IOM, UNHCR, UNOPS and WHO have also appointed dedicated staff to support victims' rights. The Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate deployed a consultant to Liberia to identify and provide support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse at the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which was closed in 2018.

33. The Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and UNFPA are co-leading an Inter-Agency Standing Committee practitioners' working group to provide recommendations on how to overcome challenges in the provision of assistance. In 2024, the Victims' Rights Advocate convened a meeting of United Nations system trust and assistance funds that were focused on other categories of victims to share lessons learned, discuss challenges and enhance collaboration.

34. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that victims have access to existing assistance programmes and projects. In Liberia, some victims were included in a project led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which enabled them to start small businesses. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) has included victim assistance in the budget under programmatic funding.

35. In 2024, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee rolled out its guidance note on referral procedures in 20 countries, with a view to providing timely assistance to victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF continued to support

the roll-out of the United Nations victim assistance protocol and technical note training package, and 20 country teams and humanitarian country teams have now been trained. Of the 32 countries tracked in the 2023 Inter-Agency Standing Committee global dashboard on sexual exploitation and abuse, 23 have integrated relevant standards and referral pathways into inter-agency standard operating procedures. The technical note will be adapted for NGOs in 2025 to establish system-wide standards for victim-centred assistance.

36. Other initiatives to enhance victim support include the WHO pilot project to map and share electronic data on the availability of health services for victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse across 24 countries. In addition, IOM piloted a regional workshop in November 2024 for 16 countries in Africa, focused on victims' rights and access to assistance, and using resources from its new support package for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse.

37. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has amplified efforts to conduct its investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse in a victim-sensitive manner, working closely with persons at the country level. Investigators report that more coordination is required for entities to improve their understanding of pathways available for accessing victim support services.

38. Significant challenges persist, however, in upholding the rights and dignity of victims. The lack of services in many of the locations where the United Nations and its partners are present poses insurmountable challenges for case management. In most countries, there is a very limited network of service providers, which is not able to meet the needs of all victims. In addition, only 26 per cent of needs in the area of gender-based violence were funded in 2024 – a drop from 33 per cent in 2023. There is little alternative predictable support for victims/survivors.

39. An internal survey conducted by UNFPA in 2024 to promote survivor-centred reporting and accountability systems identified key barriers to reporting, including fear of retaliation, risk of secondary harm, lack of trust in accountability systems and the belief that no action would be taken. A multi-country study on sexual exploitation and abuse reporting practices conducted by UNICEF with women and adolescent girls also revealed low trust in reporting channels, limited community awareness of where and how to report, concerns about confidentiality and fear of retaliation. This underscores the importance of collaborating with local women-led organizations and community structures to foster trust. UNICEF is designing an evidence-based reporting model centred on women and girls, which will be piloted in 2025 to strengthen the overall approach of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to the reporting of sexual exploitation and abuse.

40. As at 31 December 2024, only \$350,000 remained in the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Since 2016, \$5.1 million from 25 Member States and withheld payments funded 21 projects, including 4 projects completed in 2024 in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan, with 1 ongoing project in Guatemala. These projects provided medical care, psychological support and vocational training. Substantial resources are urgently needed to sustain support to victims. There is an urgent need to shift from reliance on voluntary contributions to a predictable and sustainable funding model.

Efforts for the meaningful resolution of paternity and child support claims

41. As noted in previous reports ([A/77/748](#) and [A/78/774](#)), a high-level task force chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and

Compliance is developing a reinvigorated strategy and a framework of practical measures, including provisions for monitoring progress, to facilitate the resolution of paternity cases.

42. Since 2006, approximately 750 paternity and child support claims involving peace operations personnel have been reported. Of these, more than 500 claims are pending. All such claims related to uniformed peacekeeping personnel are referred to the Member States concerned to facilitate timely resolution, in accordance with national laws. There have been varying levels of response from Member States to requests by the Secretariat to facilitate resolution of the claims. Some Member States have taken strong action to engage with the Secretariat in an effort to resolve the matters, in accordance with their national laws. Most Member States have not taken meaningful action to provide a viable path towards resolution. A small number of Member States have not responded on the issue.

43. Long-standing cases relating to children who have reached or are about to reach adulthood are particularly complex. Many of these children do not have access to schooling or healthcare and are living with great insecurity and stigma, condemned to an uncertain and precarious future.

44. As part of United Nations transparency efforts, data on paternity claims published on the “Conduct in UN field missions” website includes the number of claims reported to the Secretariat involving both uniformed and non-uniformed United Nations peace operations personnel, the number of cases pending resolution listed by Member State, the period of time for which claims have been pending and the result of DNA paternity testing, if conducted.

45. The assistance and support provided to victims and the facilitation of paternity claims related to field missions are tracked using the victim assistance tracking system, which is administered concurrently by peacekeeping operations and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance. However, there is no mechanism to monitor progress on paternity and child support claims concerning agencies, funds and programmes and their implementing partners. In terms of paternity claims, of the total of 338 claims recorded since 2017, paternity has been established in 32 instances.

46. In 2024, 11 Member States appointed national paternity focal points, increasing the total to 29. These focal points play a vital role in coordinating national efforts to support victims and their children.

47. The resolution of paternity claims must remain a priority. While claims are pending, it is important to implement interim measures to provide meaningful support to victims and their children in a manner consistent with the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel, as set out in the annex to General Assembly resolution [62/214](#). These measures can serve as both a form of immediate redress and an incentive for the timely resolution of paternity claims. Potential approaches could include withholding reimbursements to troop- and police-contributing countries until paternity-related obligations are met. Options for administering financial contributions directly to victims are under discussion.

VI. Accountability across the system

48. Accountability is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative. The new United Nations system-wide approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse consists of measures to strengthen accountability, including enhanced investigative capacities, the pooling of resources and the establishment of

specialized investigative units to ensure a robust and victim-sensitive response. Despite the progress made, systemic challenges, such as lengthy investigation and post-investigation timelines and the limited visibility of actions taken by Member States fuel perceptions of impunity and weaken the credibility of the Organization.

49. Engagements with stakeholders and extensive field visits conducted by the Special Coordinator have pointed to a persistent lack of confidence among communities, United Nations personnel, partners and some Member States in the ability of the Organization to ensure accountability. Concerns persist that measures to hold perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse accountable remain insufficient and that leaders and managers who fail to uphold their responsibilities are not being held to account for these failures. There is an acute need to work harder to build trust in the system and remain committed to managerial accountability.

Leadership accountability

50. The new United Nations system-wide approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse underscores the crucial role of leadership in driving cultural change and translating commitments into action. Leaders and managers at all levels must demonstrate zero-tolerance towards sexual exploitation and abuse by setting clear standards of accountability, ensuring transparency, implementing preventive measures and prioritizing financial and human resources for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across their organizations. They must foster an inclusive and respectful environment, ensure that staff understand standards of conduct and the consequences of misconduct and hold perpetrators accountable. These measures are crucial for empowering victims, witnesses and others to report incidents without fear of reprisal.

51. Since 2017, senior United Nations officials have reported on their personal responsibility to address sexual exploitation and abuse through annual attestations in their compacts or management letters.

52. The Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance is reviewing existing policies and procedures to continue developing the accountability framework that ensures that leaders, managers, commanders and staff have clear roles and expectations in implementing the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. For humanitarian contexts, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals reaffirmed their commitment to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by endorsing the updated statement by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, under the leadership of WFP, the 2024 Inter-Agency Standing Committee Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment.

53. In 2024, the Office of the Special Coordinator developed a practical toolkit on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for senior leaders. The toolkit contains essential guidance on responsibilities with respect to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and equips leaders with tools for effectively responding to such conduct and modelling appropriate conduct. The annual humanitarian coordinators' retreat and resident coordinators' global retreats also provided opportunities to reinforce leadership accountability on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

54. While the leadership of the United Nations system must have access to appropriate tools and processes, it is the visible and unwavering commitment of leaders at all levels that ultimately drives change and fosters a culture of safety, accountability and respect. However, alarmingly, in 2024, the survey on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse revealed a significant rise in distrust towards

leadership, with 6 per cent respondents in the United Nations system (approximately 3,700 individuals) expressing a lack of confidence in the ability of leaders to address sexual exploitation and abuse, doubling from 3 per cent in 2023. This underscores an urgent need for leaders to demonstrate stronger, more visible and accountable leadership to foster trust among the staff of the United Nations system and the communities that they serve.

VII. No impunity

55. OIOS reports that allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in certain peacekeeping operations remain at high levels, including allegations of both recent and past incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2024, OIOS initiated 116 investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse allegations, 26 of which were conducted jointly with National Investigation Officers from the relevant troop-contributing countries. In addition, OIOS completed 134 investigations during the same period, addressing cases reported in 2024 and prior years. However, investigative resourcing constraints continued to impede the ability of OIOS to complete investigations within desired time frames.

56. The timeliness of investigations involving civilian personnel also requires urgent attention. Many United Nations agencies and entities do not have clear timelines or benchmarks for the completion of investigations, although they are increasingly being put in place. For example, the WHO end-to-end sexual misconduct incident management system includes a benchmark of 200 days: 120 days for the investigation phase and 80 days for the post-investigation phase.

57. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee expert panel on standards for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment investigations considered whether the current standards governing investigations are aligned with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee principles and a victim-centred approach. A manual outlining victim-centred sexual exploitation and abuse investigation processes is under development by the United Nations system for promulgation in 2025. Key performance indicators to monitor investigation effectiveness and adherence to a victim-centred approach have been developed.

58. United Nations entities and implementing partners are addressing impunity by tackling key gaps, such as insufficient numbers of trained investigators, bureaucratic hurdles and differing legal frameworks. UNICEF has strengthened the investigative capacity of its implementing partners through targeted training in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Lebanon, in collaboration with inter-agency networks focused on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

59. The pervasive perception of impunity cannot be changed without addressing all outstanding cases. If trust cannot be built and maintained then the reach, integrity and impact of the United Nations operations in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse will continue to be undermined. Addressing the outstanding caseload is therefore essential, even if it will require a significant investment of time and resources.

60. Prolonged post-investigation and disciplinary processes remain significant challenges, further eroding confidence in the efforts of the United Nations system to combat impunity. For instance, the average time for the disposition of sexual exploitation and abuse cases by the Office of Human Resources in relation to staff members was 14 months in 2022 (see [A/78/603](#)), 19.5 months in 2023 and 9.2 months in 2024.

61. Perceptions of impunity and inaction are exacerbated by the lack of visibility of actions taken in response to sexual exploitation and abuse allegations. WHO sets a strong example by publishing anonymized monthly data on sexual exploitation and abuse allegations and disciplinary actions, while the Office of Human Resources of the Secretariat prepares a compendium of disciplinary decisions on an annual basis, although this is not well known to staff. However, such practices are not yet standardized across the United Nations system. To foster trust and confidence in disciplinary processes and deter future misconduct, the United Nations must continue to enhance system-wide transparency on accountability efforts by providing information on disciplinary actions. In 2025, the disciplinary decisions pertaining to sexual exploitation and abuse cases included in the compendium published by the Secretariat will also be published on the United Nations website.¹

62. The commitment of the United Nations to combating sexual exploitation and abuse must be visible and tangible to rebuild trust. Strengthening all aspects of the accountability chain – reporting, investigations, disciplinary processes and criminal accountability – is critical to addressing impunity.

VIII. Facilitating accountability at the national level

63. All acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, regardless of whether they constitute crimes under national law, violate the values and standards of the United Nations. When credible allegations related to staff and experts on mission may amount to crimes, the United Nations refers them to the alleged perpetrator's State of nationality and cooperates with national investigations, without prejudice to the right of victims or witnesses to report directly to national authorities. Credible allegations related to peacekeepers are referred to Member States in accordance with their memorandums of understanding.

64. The Secretariat reports annually on Member States' responses to sexual exploitation and abuse cases referred to them for criminal accountability. As noted in my recent report on criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission (A/79/189, annex I), approximately 65 per cent of cases concerning sexual exploitation and abuse have received no response, with some pending since 2008. When Member States fail to act on referrals, impunity prevails and the ability to prevent future harm is significantly undermined.

65. In 2024, OIOS initiated 15 investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse allegations where troop-contributing countries failed to respond to the Secretariat's request to appoint a National Investigation Officer. Concerns also persist regarding the timeliness and quality of investigations conducted by Member States, further undermining accountability efforts.

66. To strengthen the capacity of Member States to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, OIOS led two train-the-trainers courses in 2024, developed and delivered in coordination with the Department of Peace Operations, and provided guidance on investigations conducted by National Investigation Officers to 51 participants from 17 Member States.

67. The Secretariat stands ready to collaborate with and support Member States in strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing investigative capacities and enforcing accountability in sexual exploitation and abuse cases. In 2023, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance launched the Member State module to help Member States to manage cases involving their uniformed personnel. By

¹ See <https://hr.un.org/page/compendium-disciplinary-measures>.

providing access to a subset of data from the Secretariat's Case Management Tracking System and offering training, the module enables Member States to resolve allegations quickly and monitor trends and risks. However, the data for 2024 show that only 20 per cent of the 53 registered Member States are using the tool.

68. Failures of command and control in establishing and enforcing sexual exploitation and abuse prevention measures remain a persistent challenge. Implementing proactive measures on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, such as appointing advisers or focal points on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in all military units, can help to mitigate sexual exploitation and abuse risks.

69. I urge Member States to prioritize the appointment of National Investigation Officers and allocate dedicated resources for timely, thorough and quality investigations to uphold accountability and rebuild trust in the United Nations system.

IX. Engagement with Member States and civil society

70. The Secretary-General's strategy underscores the importance of a coherent and collaborative approach across all stakeholders, including Member States, civil society organizations, research institutions and the private sector in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. As funding for development and humanitarian activities declines and peacekeeping environments evolve, fostering strong partnerships with local stakeholders and advancing greater localization are critical to achieving sustainable outcomes. In 2024, initiatives led by Member States, United Nations entities and implementing partners focused on fostering aligned approaches to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

71. The United Nations continues to enhance collaboration with Member States to strengthen the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse. In May 2024, the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse endorsed a model clause on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, establishing a system-wide framework for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in countries. The framework will enhance government capacities and promote an inclusive aligned approach to sexual exploitation and abuse by engaging all sectors and stakeholders.

72. As part of a multi-stakeholder steering committee, representatives of United Nations entities, along with Member States, NGOs and other experts, have developed a Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment and have participated in the meetings of the Reference Group on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment established by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with a view to promoting alignment across sectors and entities and assessing progress made towards ending sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The United Nations has much to gain from closer interaction with civil society and external experts, Member States and organizations in its efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse.

73. WHO convened several events with stakeholders, including four quarterly Member State briefings. The seventy-seventh World Health Assembly recognized the progress that had been made and called for proposals on Member State accountability for ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in joint operations. A two-day technical consultation with researchers and academics was held in April to address evidence gaps and shape a systematic review to guide efforts relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition, the second annual Stakeholder Review Conference for the Prevention of and Response to

Sexual Misconduct was held in December, bringing together more than 100 senior officials and experts from across the United Nations system, NGOs, academia and civil society to advance collective efforts relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

74. In 2024, the Office of the Special Coordinator and the CHS Alliance launched an initiative to jointly analyse data from the United Nations iReport sexual exploitation and abuse tracker and the Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Harmonized Reporting Scheme, which aggregates anonymous data from 81 NGOs. The initiative helped to identify critical trends and fostered learning from aggregated data, providing critical insights to inform policies and strategies.

75. Building on this, the Special Coordinator will launch a unified data portal in 2025 as a central hub for information related to sexual exploitation and abuse across the aid sector. The portal will merge peacekeeping and non-peacekeeping allegations and be aligned with data from the CHS Alliance Harmonized Reporting Scheme to support better identification and analysis of trends across the whole sector – regarding peacekeeping, humanitarian and development activities, as well as those of the implementing partners – to enable a more holistic analysis of sexual exploitation and abuse trends and inform evidence-based interventions.

X. Communications

76. Consistent and clear communication is essential to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system. Efforts are currently under way to develop a cohesive system-wide communications strategy, which will ensure consistent messaging, promote a shared understanding of sexual exploitation and abuse and its consequences and reinforce the zero-tolerance policy on such behaviour and on inaction in addressing it. A key focus will be on prevention, as well as prioritizing the voices, rights and dignity of victims, while promoting transparency, reinforcing accountability and reflecting the core values and principles of the United Nations.

77. The paternity task force has launched a communications plan, which includes briefings to Member States, media engagement and a dedicated digital campaign.

XI. Overview of data on allegations

78. In 2024, 675 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse were reported, including 292 related to United Nations staff and related personnel and 383 related to personnel of implementing partners and non-United Nations forces.

Allegations reported in peacekeeping operations and special political missions

79. A total of 102 allegations were reported in peacekeeping operations and special political missions in 2024, an increase from the 100 allegations reported in 2023. This is the third time in the last 10 years that 100 or more allegations have been recorded in a single year. The increase is attributable mainly to a majority of the allegations being incidents that took place more than two years before the complaints were received, with 62 such allegations received in 2024. Forty allegations reported in 2024 are linked to incidents that occurred in 2024 or 2023, with an increase to 21 allegations reported in 2024 that occurred in 2024, as compared with

15 allegations reported in 2023 for that same year. Four allegations reported in 2024 were for incidents in a year that has yet to be determined.

80. The allegations recorded in 2024 identified 125 victims, of whom 98 are adults and 27 are children. This was fewer than the 145 victims identified in 2023, which included 28 child victims. Ten allegations received in 2024 involved multiple victims.

81. Sixty-six allegations reported in 2024 related to acts of sexual exploitation of adult victims only, compared with 70 such allegations in 2023. Thirty-two allegations reported in 2024 were associated with allegations of sexual abuse involving child victims or adult victims, compared with 24 such allegations reported in 2023. Four allegations involved both sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. At least 129 perpetrators have been identified as being involved in the allegations recorded in 2024. Sixty-five allegations reported in 2024 were associated with 90 paternity and child support claims.²

82. Two missions accounted for 82 per cent of allegations, split roughly equally between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the former United Nations Observer Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 44 allegations, and MINUSCA, with 40 allegations. The remaining 18 allegations were recorded in four other peacekeeping missions, three special political missions and one support office: UNMISS (7), the former UNMIL (4), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (1), the former United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (1), the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (1), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (1), the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant whose mandate has recently come to an end (1) and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (2).

83. There were increases in the numbers of allegations involving civilian personnel, with 38 allegations in 2024 compared with 25 allegations in 2023, and police or other Government-provided personnel, with 13 allegations in 2024 compared with 8 allegations in 2023. However, there was a decrease in allegations involving military personnel, with 51 allegations in 2024 compared with 67 in 2023.

84. Allegations continue to be reported for events in past years, going back to 2005. This is primarily the situation for allegations involving uniformed personnel, where 61 per cent of the 64 allegations reported in 2024 involved events that ended in 2019 or earlier. On the other hand, only 23 per cent of the 38 allegations reported in 2024 involving civilian personnel are associated with events ending in 2019 or earlier. The situation with uniformed personnel, coupled with the reduction in the number of allegations reported against military personnel, could demonstrate that prevention efforts by several troop- and police-contributing countries, including the adoption of action plans, are effective. These efforts must remain robust, as should additional efforts targeted specifically at civilian personnel.

85. Investigation reports from OIOS are still awaited in relation to six allegations reported in 2023 involving military, police or civilian personnel. This represents a decrease in the number of investigations pending completion for more than one year, compared with the data for 2023. Decisions regarding possible disciplinary sanctions by the United Nations for substantiated allegations against staff members are pending with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance for four allegations involving staff members, and with UNDP for two allegations involving

² Further information on allegations, including the status of allegations recorded since 2015, is available at <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>.

United Nations Volunteers reported in 2021, 2022 or 2023 but for which investigations were completed only within the last 12 months.

86. The Secretariat continued its targeted high-level engagements with troop- and police-contributing countries, aimed at enabling them to address pending matters. Nonetheless, investigations conducted by 28 Member States on allegations received in 2023 or earlier remain open, pending the receipt of information or additional information for 189 allegations. This represents an increase from last year. Information from 25 Member States on accountability measures taken for 62 substantiated allegations involving police and military personnel remains pending in respect of allegations recorded in 2023 or earlier, representing a slight improvement from last year.

87. As detailed earlier in the present report, efforts continue towards addressing pending paternity and child support claims. Out of a total of 750 paternity claims recorded between 2006 and 31 January 2025, 517 (69 per cent) are pending resolution, including 47 claims dating back over a decade. For uniformed personnel, actions are pending with 42 Member States concerning 431 claims reported in 2023, or earlier.³

88. Efforts are also under way to address critical gaps in post-mission contexts. sexual exploitation and abuse reports, particularly paternity claims, often emerge during mission drawdowns or years after missions' closure, leaving victims and their children without support. To address this critical gap, an inter-agency working group, established in 2024 and co-chaired by the Office of the Special Coordinator, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and UNICEF, is tasked with developing a strategy and guidance to ensure sustained measures on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including funding mechanisms for ensuring long-term victim support and standard operating procedures for handling allegations. The guidance, that is being developed in close consultation with field missions, will be finalized and rolled out in 2025.

89. Additional information concerning the issues covered in this section is provided in the supplementary information to the present report, including information where action is expected to be taken by Member States to address pending allegations.

United Nations entities (other than peacekeeping operations and special political missions and their implementing partners)

90. In 2024, 190 allegations relating to personnel of agencies, funds and programmes were reported, compared with 284 allegations in 2023. Seven allegations have been substantiated, 16 were unsubstantiated, 51 are under investigation, 27 are under assessment and 89 were closed due to a 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 284 allegations reported in 2023, 45 were under investigation, six were substantiated, 15 were unsubstantiated, 88 were under assessment and 130 were closed.

³ A new feature was added in 2024 to the "Conduct in UN field missions" website, providing data specifically related to paternity claims, including information on status, Member States associated with the claims and years claims were reported. See <https://conduct.unmissions.org/paternity-data>.

Allegations involving personnel of implementing partners

91. In 2024, 382 allegations relating to personnel of implementing partners not under the authority of the United Nations were reported, compared with 374 allegations in 2023.

Non-United Nations forces

92. In 2024, the United Nations received one allegation involving members of non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to engage with Member States in relation to past allegations, advocating for the establishment of processes leading to redress for victims and accountability for perpetrators. Most of these involve members of forces that are no longer deployed, and events alleged to have occurred several years ago.

93. Ensuring effective protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in the mandates of all peace operations, including non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate, is critical. In Haiti, OHCHR supported the Multinational Security Support Mission in developing frameworks on human rights and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including its conduct and discipline policy and a complaints and reporting mechanism. It provided sexual exploitation and abuse training for the leadership of the Multinational Security Support Mission and facilitated engagement with civil society in collaboration with United Nations entities and the inter-agency coordinator for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in Haiti. Despite the progress made, challenges remain in fully integrating human rights standards and ensuring implementation owing to limited funding and capacity. OHCHR has also strengthened its presence in the country to enhance support to the Multinational Security Support Mission and to monitor and report allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

XII. Recommendations and the way forward

94. The present report contains evidence of a sustained commitment to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, demonstrating progress in key areas. However, structural gaps and challenges must be addressed if the United Nations system is to truly fulfil its obligation to protect and support affected individuals and communities. Moving forward with the institutionalization of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system requires a concerted, coordinated and committed effort to address gaps in prevention, accountability and victim support.

95. It is imperative to ensure that victims and survivors have a voice, receive assistance and are afforded justice. Their needs must shape efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. It is also critical to have more dedicated and specialized personnel to advance the rights of victims and to implement a collective mechanism to monitor assistance to victims across the system and thus ensure a common approach.

96. The United Nations and Member States must redouble efforts to tackle the system-wide perception that impunity persists. Intensifying efforts to combat this perception requires reducing timelines associated with sexual exploitation and abuse cases, which can be achieved by augmenting investigative and post-investigative processing capacities. Equally important is improving the clarity and transparency of communications with all stakeholders regarding processes and outcomes, which would demonstrate leadership commitment to combating sexual exploitation and

abuse. Addressing the large caseload needs to be a priority and requires additional resources.

97. In order to meaningfully advance protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, efforts must be made to reinforce accountability. I urge Member States to take decisive action to hold their nationals who have served with the United Nations accountable for sexual exploitation and abuse and to provide the Organization with updates on cases for criminal accountability, as called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 79/116. I also call upon Member States to designate focal points and fully utilize the Secretariat's Case Management Tracking System, which is a critical accountability mechanism. Regarding child support and paternity claims, I call upon Member States to strengthen their efforts to hold their nationals accountable and ensure that the children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse receive the rights and privileges applicable to them under national law and international conventions, including citizenship. Lastly, to ensure holistic justice for victims, I urge Member States to align their national legislation with international standards on victims' rights and the United Nations framework on sexual exploitation and abuse, and to adopt a more flexible legal approach to addressing paternity and child support claims and make available interim support to these children until the legal process is concluded.

98. The United Nations will also continue efforts to uphold its own commitment to accountability. In 2025, I will examine ways to bring even greater attention to this critical issue, ensuring senior United Nations officials are held personally accountable when addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. The Organization is committed to fully upholding the rights and dignity of victims as the cornerstone of its approach to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

XIII. Conclusions

99. In the face of constrained peacekeeping, humanitarian and development budgets, the United Nations and its Member States must ensure appropriate and predictable resourcing of efforts relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and victim assistance. Limited resources can exacerbate power differentials and inequality, creating higher risks and more opportunities for sexual exploitation and abuse. This makes immediate and sustained prevention efforts even more critical. Resource constraints cannot be an excuse for failing victims and the communities that the United Nations serves. A coordinated approach will ensure efficiency and enable prioritization of funding for agreed priorities both for building country capacity and for implementing system-wide initiatives.

100. The path forward requires collective action and unwavering commitment from all. The United Nations and its Member States must take decisive action to implement enhanced measures to effectively prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, fostering a sustainable organizational culture that truly embodies the principle of "do no harm". Only sustained and unified action can safeguard the integrity of the collective work of the United Nations and maintain the trust placed in it by those who it serves.